

OFF
SANDY HOOK



RICHARD DEHAN

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OFF SANDY HOOK
AND OTHER STORIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE MAN OF IRON

ONE BRAVER THING (THE DOP
DOCTOR)

BETWEEN TWO THIEVES

THE HEADQUARTER RECRUIT

THE COST OF WINGS

OFF SANDY HOOK

AND OTHER STORIES

BY
RICHARD DEHAN

*Author of "One Braver Thing" ("The Dop Doctor"),
"The Man of Iron," "Between Two Thieves," etc.*



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OFF SANDY HOOK
AND OTHER STORIES

OFF SANDY HOOK

ON board the Rampatina liner, eleven days and a half out from Liverpool, the usual terrific sensation created by the appearance of the pilot-yacht prevailed. Necks were craned and toes were trodden on as the steamer slackened speed, and a line dexterously thrown by a blue-jerseyed deck-hand was caught by somebody aboard the yacht. The pilot, not insensible to the fact of his being a personage of note, carefully divested his bearded countenance of all expression as he saluted the Captain, and taking from the deck-steward's obsequiously proffered salver a glass containing four-fingers of neat Bourbon whisky, concealed its contents about his person without perceptible emotion, and went up with the First Officer upon the upper bridge as the relieved skipper plunged below. The telegraphs clicked their message—the leviathan hulk of the liner quivered and began to forge slowly ahead, and an intelligent-looking, thin-lipped, badly-shaved young man in a bowler, tweeds, and striped necktie, introduced himself to the Second Officer as an emissary of the Press.

“Mr. Cyrus K. Pillson, *New York Yeller*. . . . Pleased to know you, sir,” said the Second Officer; “step into the smoke-room, this way. Bar-steward, a brandy cocktail for me, and you, sir, order whatever you are most in the habit of hoisting. Whisky straight! Now, sir, happy to afford you what information I can!”

“I presume,” observed the young gentleman of the

Press, settling himself on the springy morocco cushions and accepting the Second Officer's polite offer of a green Havana of the strongest kind, "that you have had a smooth passage, considerin' the time of year?"

"Smooth. . . ." The Second Officer carefully reversed in his reply the Pressman's remark: "Well, yes, the time of year considered, a smooth passage, I take it, we *have* had."

"No fogs?" interrogated the young gentleman, clicking the elastic band of a notebook which projected from his breast-pocket.

"Fogs? . . . No!" said the Second Officer.

"You didn't chance," pursued the young gentleman of the Press, taking his short drink from the steward's salver and throwing it contemptuously down his throat, "to fall in with a berg off the Bank, did you?"

"Not a smell of one!" replied the Second Officer with decision.

"Ran into a derelict hencoop, perhaps?" persisted the young gentleman, concealing the worn sole of a wearied boot from the searching glare of the electric light by tucking it underneath him, "or an old lady's bonnet-box? . . . or a rubber doll some woman's baby had lost overboard? No?" he echoed, as the Second Officer shook his head. "Then, how in thunder did you manage to lose twenty feet of your port-rail?"

"Carried away," said the Second Officer, offering the young Press gentleman a light.

"No, thanks. Always eat mine," said the young Press gentleman gracefully.

"Matter of taste," observed the Second Officer, blowing blue rings.

"I guess so; and I've a taste for knowing how you came," said the young Pressman, "to part with that twenty foot of rail."

"Carried away," said the Second Officer.

"I kin see that," retorted the visitor.

"It was carried away," said the Second Officer, "by an elephant."

"A pet you had running about aboard?" queried the Pressman, with imperturbable coolness.

"A passenger," returned the Second Officer, with equal calm.

There was a snap, and the Pressman's notebook was open on his knee. The pencil vibrated over the virgin page, when a curious utterance, between a wail, a cough, and a roar, made the hand that held it start.

"Yarr-rr! Ohowgh! Yarr!" The melancholy sound came from without, borne on the cool breeze of a late afternoon in March, through the open ventilators.

"Might that," queried the young gentleman of the Press, "be an expression of opinion on the part of the elephant?"

"Lord love you, no!" said the Second Officer. "It's the leopard." He added after a second's pause: "Or the puma."

"Do you happen to have a menagerie aboard?" inquired the Pressman, making a note in shorthand.

"No, sir. The beasts—elephants, leopards, and a box of cobras—are invoiced from the London Docks to a wealthy amateur in New York State. Not an iron king, or a corn king, or a cotton king, or a pickle king, or a kerosene king," said the Second Officer, with a steady upper lip, "but a chewing-gum king."

"If you mean Shadland C. McOster," said the Pressman, "my mother is his cousin. They used to chew gum together in school recess, sir, little guessing that Shad would one day soar, on wings made of that article, to the realms of gilded plutocracy."

"I rather imagine the name you mention to be the right one," said the Second Officer cautiously, "but I won't commit myself. The beasts shipped from Liver-

pool are intended as a present for the purchaser's infant daughter on her fifth birthday."

"Yarr-rr! Ohowgh! Ohowgh!" Again the coughing roar vibrated through the smoke-room. Then the chorus of "Hail Columbia!" rose from the promenade deck, where the lady passengers were assembled ready to wave starred and striped silk pocket-handkerchiefs and exchange patriotic sentiments at the first glimpse of land.

"It's not what I should call a humly voice, that of the leopard," observed the Pressman, controlling a slight shiver.

"Children have queer tastes," said the Second Officer. "And it's as well Old Spots is lively, as Bingo's dead."

"Bingo?" queried the Pressman.

"Bingo was the elephant," said the Second Officer, passing the palm of his brown right hand over his upper lip as the Pressman made a few rapid notes. "And if the particulars of the deathbed scene are likely to be of any interest to you—why, you're welcome to 'em!"

"You're white!" said the Pressman warmly, licking his pencil. "What did your elephant die of?"

"Seasickness!" said the Second Officer calmly.

"I've seen a few things worth seeing—myself," said the Pressman enviously, "but not a seasick elephant."

"With a professional lady-nurse in attendance," said the Second Officer; "all complete from stem to stern, in her print gown, white apron, fly-away cap-rigging, and ward shoes."

The Pressman grunted, but not from lack of interest. Doubled up in the corner of the smoke-room divan, his note-book balanced on his bulging shirt-front, he made furious notes. The Second Officer waited until the pencil seemed hungry, and then fed it with a little more information.

“When that girl came aboard at Liverpool with her mackintosh and holdall and little black shiny bag,” he went on, “I just noticed her in a passing sort of way as a fresh-colored, tidy-looking young woman, rather plump in the bows, and with an air as though she meant to get her full money’s worth out of her eleven-pound fare. But our cheap tariff had filled the passenger-lists fairly full, and I’d a long score of things to attend to. A special derrick had had to be rigged to sling the elephant’s cage aboard, and a capital one it was, of sound Indian teak strengthened with steel—must have cost a mint of money. We stowed it, after a lot of sweat and swearing, on the promenade deck, abaft the funnels, bolting it to rings specially screwed in the deck, passing a wire hawser across the top, which was made fast to the port and starboard davits, and rigging weather-screens of double tarpaulin to keep Bingo warm and dry. The other beasts we shipped under the lee of the forward cabin skylight; and I’d just got through the job when a quiet ladylike voice at my elbow says:

“‘If you please, officer, with regard to my patient, I wish to know——’

“‘Ask the purser, ma’am,’ I said, rather snappishly, for I was hot and worried . . . ‘or the head-stewardess.’

“‘I have asked them both,’ says the voice in a calm, determined way, ‘and have been referred to you.’

“‘Well, what is it?’ says I.

“‘By mistake,’ says the young lady—for a young lady she was, and a hospital nurse besides, neatly rigged out in the usual uniform—‘by mistake I have had allotted to me a bedroom on the ground-floor, so far from my patient that I cannot possibly hear him should he call me in the night. And,’ she went on, as the breeze played with her white silk bonnet-strings and the wavy little kinks of soft brown hair that framed her fore-

head, 'and I want you to move me to the upper floor at once.'

" 'You mean the promenade deck, madam,' says I, smoothing out a grin, though I'm well enough used to the odd bungles land-folks make over names of things at sea."

The flying pencil stopped. The Pressman looked up, turning his shortened cigar between his teeth.

"When do we come to the elephant?" he asked.

"We're at him now," said the Second Officer. " 'You mean the promenade deck,' says I. 'Does your patient occupy one of the cabins on the port or the starboard side, and may I ask his number and name?' Then she smiled at me brightly, her eyes and teeth making a sort of flash together. 'He doesn't have a cabin,' says she; 'he sleeps in a cage. My patient is Bingo, the elephant!'"

"Great Pierpont Morgan!" ejaculated the Pressman. His previously flying pencil became almost invisible from the extreme rapidity with which he plied it. Drops of perspiration broke out upon his sallow forehead. "Glory!" he cried. "And not another man thought it worth while to run out and tackle this wallowing old tub but me!"

"I touched my cap," went on the Second Officer, "keeping down as professionally as I could the surprise I felt. . . . 'Do I understand, madam,' I asked, 'that you are the elephant's nurse?' And at that she nodded with another bright smile, and told me that she was Nurse Amy, of St. Baalam's Nursing Association, London, specially engaged by the American gentleman who had bought the elephant——"

"Shadland C. McOster," prompted the Pressman, without looking up.

"To attend to the animal on the voyage. It was understood that if the principal patient's condition per-

mitted, Nurse Amy was to pay the leopards such attentions as they were capable of appreciating, but there was no pressure on this point."

"Ohowgh!" coughed the voice outside. "Yarr! Ohowgh!"

"He smells the land, I guess," said the Pressman.

"Or the niggers," suggested the Second Officer. "You ought to have heard Bingo when we were three days out from the Mersey. . . . We'd had a fair wind and a smooth sea at first, and nothing delighted the ladies and children on board like feeding him with apples, and nuts, and biscuits, and things prigged from the saloon tables. The sea-air must have sharpened the beast's appetite, I suppose, for that old trunk of his was snorking round all day, and the Purser, who was naturally wild about it, said he must have put away hogsheads of good things in addition to his allowance of hay, and bread, and beetroot, and grain, and cabbages, and sugar——"

"Was he ca'am in temper?" asked the Pressman.

"Mild as milk. . . . As kind a beast as ever breathed; and elephants do a lot of breathing," said the Second Officer. "The ladies and gentlemen in the upper-deck cabins used to complain about his snoring in the night; but as Nurse Amy said, there are people who'd complain about anything. And some of 'em didn't like the smell of elephant—which, I'll allow, when you happened to get to wind'ard of Bingo, was—pew!"

"Pooty vociferous?" hinted the Pressman.

"Until," went on the Second Officer, "Nurse Amy took to washing him with scented soap."

The pencil stopped. The Pressman looked up with circular eyes. "Scented——"

"Soap," said the Second Officer. "No expense was to be spared—and we'd several cases of a special toilet

and complexion article on board. By the living Harry! if you'd seen that elephant standing up over his morning tub of hot water, swabbing away at himself with a deck-sponge Nurse Amy had soaped for him, and then squirting the water over himself to rinse off the soap, you'd have believed in the intelligence of animals. The sight drew like a pantomime. . . . But by the sixth day out Bingo had given up all interest in his own appearance. The weather was squally, a bit of a sea got up, hardly a passenger put in an appearance at the saloon tables, and Bingo only shook his ears when the bugle blew, and turned away from his morning haystack and mound of cabbages with disgust. Nurse Amy got him to eat some biscuits and drink a bucket of Bovril, but you could see he was only doing it to oblige her. 'Oh, come, cheer up!' she said in a brisk, professional way. 'You'll get your sea-legs on directly and the officer says we're having a wonderfully smooth passage, considering the time of the year.' But Bingo only sighed, and two tears trickled out of his little red eyes, as he swayed from side to side. 'He'll be worse before he's better,' says I; for somehow I was generally about when Nurse Amy was looking after her big charge. 'He'll be worse before he's better,' *and he was.*'

The Pressman's face was streaked and shiny, his hair lay glued to his brow. The pencil went on, devouring page after page.

"Nurse Amy, luckily for her patient, was not upset by the pitching of the vessel, for it blew half a gale steady from the sou'-west, and the old *Centipede* dipped her nose pretty frequently. Nurse was as busy as a bee endeavoring by every means she could devise or adopt from the suggestions of the stewardesses, who showed a good deal of interest in her and her charge, to alleviate the sufferings of Bingo. I have seen that little woman stand for an hour on the wet planking,

holding a six-foot deck-swab soaked with eau-de-Cologne to Bingo's forehead. . . ."

The Pressman jotted down, breathing heavily. "Deck-swab soaked in eau-de-Cologne . . ." he muttered. "Must have cost slathers of money, I reckon——"

"No expense was to be spared," the Second Officer reminded him gently. "As for the brandy, Martell's Three Star, he must have put away a dozen bottles a day."

"No blamed wonder his head ached!" said the Pressman, moistening his own dry lips.

"Except an occasional bucket of arrowroot with port wine and a tin or so of cuddy biscuits, the animal would take no other nourishment whatever," continued the Second Officer. "As he grew weaker and weaker, it was touching to see the way in which he clung to Nurse Amy."

"Clung to her?" the Pressman wrote, marking the words for a headline.

"Fact," said the Second Officer. "He would put his trunk round her waist, and lay his head on her shoulder as she stood on a ladder lashed against the side of his cage. And he would hang out his forefoot to have his pulse felt, quite in a Christian style. Then when Nurse Amy wanted to take his temperature, the docile brute would curl up his fire-hose—I mean his trunk—and open his mouth, so that the instrument might be comfortably placed under his tongue."

"By gings, sir, this story is going to knock corners off creation!" gasped the Pressman, pausing to wipe his face with a slightly smeary cuff. "An elephant that understood the use of the therm—blame it! that beast robbed some man of a fortune when he passed in his checks!"

"We lost so many of the ordinary kind of instrument in this way," went on the Second Officer, almost pen-

sively, "that at last Nurse Amy was obliged to fall back upon the large thermometer and barometer combined that usually hung in the first saloon. But it recorded, to our sorrow, no improvement. The mercury steadily sank, and it became plain to Nurse Amy's professional eye that her patient was not long for this world."

"Say, do you believe elephants have souls?" queried the Pressman. The Second Officer deigned no reply.

"She could not leave him a moment; he trumpeted so awfully when he saw her quit his side. I forgot to tell you that from the moment he first felt himself attacked by sea-sickness his bellows of rage and agony were frightful to hear. The other animals became excited by them; they roared and snarled without cessation."

"Raised general hell," said the Pressman, "with trimmings." But he wrote down with a sign that meant leaded spaces and giant capitals:

"PANDEMONIUM IN MID-OCEAN!"

"Nobody on board got a wink of sleep," said the Second Officer—"that is, unless the devoted Nurse Amy was by the sufferer's side. Towards the end, when, exhausted by days and nights of arduous nursing, the devoted girl had retired to her deck-cabin to snatch a few moments of much-needed rest, the entire crew vied with each other in efforts to pacify Bingo, without the slightest effect. When they tried to put his feet in hot water he mashed the ship's buckets like so many gooseberries, and shot the Purser down with half a trunkful of hot cocoa, which had been offered as a last resource. But on Nurse Amy's appearing he grew pacified, and from that moment until the end the heroic woman never left his side. I begged her to consider herself and those dear to her," said the Second Officer, with a little

tremble in his voice, "but she only smiled—a worn kind of smile—and said that duty must be considered first. I won't deny it," said the Second Officer, openly producing a very white pocket-handkerchief and unfolding it. "I kissed that woman's hand as though she had been the Queen." He concealed his face with the handkerchief and coughed rather loudly.

"The Rude Shellback Touched to the Quick," wrote the Pressman. "He Sheds Tears." "Get on with the death-scene, sir, if you don't object!" he said, breathing through his nose excitedly. "If that elephant asked for a minister, I'd not be surprised!"

"He did make his will, after a fashion," said the narrator. "You see, during the convulsive struggles I have described, when he broke off his right tusk—didn't I mention that?"

"No!" denied the Pressman.

"He broke it, anyhow, right off short, as a boy might snap a carrot," said the Second Officer. "There it lay, among the litter, in the bottom of his cage. He had suddenly ceased trumpeting, and a deathly silence had fallen on all creation, one would have said. The vessel still rolled a bit, but the wind had fallen, and the sun was going down like a blot of fire, on the——"

"Western horizon," wrote the Pressman.

"Nurse Amy, from her ladder, still rendered the last offices of human kindness to the sinking animal, sponging his forehead with ice-water and fanning him with a bellows. As she whispered to me that the end was near, Bingo opened his eyes. With an expiring effort he lifted the broken tusk from the bottom of the cage, dropped it on the deck at his faithful Nurse's feet, uttered a heavy groan, threw up his trunk, sank gently forward upon his massive knees, and died!"

"The editor of the opposition paper will do another die when he runs his eye over the *Yeller* to-morrow

morning," said the Pressman, joyfully smacking the rubber band round the filled notebook. "And the port-rail got carried away when you yanked the body overboard?"

"We couldn't stuff him," said the Second Officer with a sigh. "As for preserving him in spirits, we hadn't enough spirits left to think of it. We rigged a special derrick, and heaved Bingo overboard, carrying away, as you have guessed, the port-rail in the operation. As Bingo's tremendous carcass rose and floated buoyantly away to leeward, back and head well above the water, and the two great ears resting flat upon the surface like gigantic lily-pads, Nurse Amy uttered a faint cry and swooned in my arms."

"Some folks get all the luck!" commented the Pressman, who, having filled his book, was now jotting down notes upon his left cuff.

"You've not much to complain of, it strikes me!" observed the Second Officer, with a glance at the crammed notebook.

"I guess that's true!" said the Pressman, with a sigh of satisfaction. "Now, all I want is a photograph or a sketch of that splendid heroine of a girl, and the honor of shaking her hand, and telling her she deserves to be an American—and I'd not trade places with the President."

The Second Officer appeared to be struggling with some emotion. The muscles of his mouth worked violently. He reddened through the red, and suspicious moisture shone in his eyes. One by one the members of the silent but not unappreciative audience of male passengers that had gradually gathered within earshot of the Second Officer and his victim, manifested the same symptoms. And glancing for the first time at those listening faces, and observing the identical expression stamped upon each, the Pressman, encircled by wet, crinkled eyes,

and cheerfully-curved-back lips, fringed with teeth in all stages of preservation, grasped the conviction that he had been had. And at this crucial moment the hatch-door of the smoke-room rolled back in its brass coamings, and a pointed gray beard and kindly keen eyes, sheltered by the peak of a gold-laced cap, appeared in the aperture.

“New York Harbor, gentlemen,” said the Captain genially. “We’re running into the docks now, and the Custom House officers will board us directly. . . . I shouldn’t wonder,” he continued, as the majority of the occupants of the smoke-room one by one glided away, “if the newspapers made a story out of our missing port-rail!”

“Permit me to introduce myself as a reporter of the *N’York Yeller*,” said the young gentleman in tweeds, as he rose and touched his hat. “Perhaps, sir, you would favor me with the facts in connection with the occurrence?”

“Haven’t you had it from Murchison? Why, Murchison——” the Captain was beginning, when with a choking snort the Second Officer rushed from the smoke-room. “Though there’s nothing to tell, Mr. Reporter, worth hearing. A derrick-chain broke at Southampton Docks, and a case of agricultural machine-parts did the damage. We temporarily repaired with some iron piping, and a length of wire hawser; but, of course, it shows badly, and suggests——”

“A collision!” said a smiling stranger.

“Or an elephant,” said another.

“Yarr!” proclaimed the horrible voice outside. “Ohowgh! Yarr!”

“I understand,” said the Pressman with an effort, “that the elephant emanated from the teeming brain of Mr. Murchison. But the leopard—there is a leopard, I surmise, if hearing goes for evidence?”

The Captain's excellent teeth showed under his gray mustache. "That noise, you mean?" he exclaimed. . . . "Oh, that's one of our electric air-pumps, for forcing air into the lower-deck storage chambers, you know. She's out of gear, and lets us know it in that way. Must have her seen to at New York. Take a drink, won't you? Come, gentlemen, order what you please."

"Whisky, square," murmured the Pressman, as the long, smooth glide of the liner was checked, the engines throbbed and stopped, and the dull roar of the docks pressed upon listening ears. He drank, and as the fluid traversed the usual channel, his eye grew brighter. . . . "Say, Captain," he asked, "do you know where your Second Officer was raised?"

"Murchison comes, I believe, from Yorkshire," said the Captain. "Hey, Murchison, isn't that the place?"

"I am not acquainted with the geology of Yorkshire," observed the Pressman, as he passed the Second Officer on his way to the smoke-room; "but the soil grows good liars! So long!"

GEMINI

AN EMBARRASSMENT OF CHOICE

To Captain Galahad Ranking, grilling over his Musketry-Instructorship at Hounslow one arid July, came a square lilac envelope, addressed in a sprawling hand, with plenty of violet ink. The missive smelt of Rhine violets. It bore a monogram, the initials "L. K." fantastically intertwined, and was, in fact, an invitation from his affectionate cousin Laura, dated from a pleasant country mansion situate amid green lawns and blushing rose-gardens on the Werkshire reaches of the Thames.

Laura was not Galahad's cousin by blood, but by marriage. Laura was the still young and attractive widow of Thomson Kingdom, once a stout man on the Stock Exchange, remarkable for a head of very upright gray hair and a startling taste in printed linen. Pigs and peaches were his pet hobbies, and the apoplectic seizure from which he never rallied was induced by a weakness in "the City" caused by unprecedentedly heavy selling-orders from a nervous north-eastern European capital, about the time of the *entente cordiale*. So the bloom was barely off Laura's crêpe, and the new black gloves purchased by Galahad to grace his kinsman's obsequies had not done duty at another funeral. The scrawly postscript to her letter said: "I want to consult you *very particularly*, in the *most absolute confidence*, upon a matter affecting my *whole future*."

Galahad Ranking, Junior Captain, Fourth Battalion Royal Deershire Regiment, wrinkled up his freckled

little countenance into queer puckers, and rubbed his bristly cinnamon-colored hair, already getting thin on the summit of his skull, as he puzzled the brain within that receptacle as to the possible meaning of Laura's impassioned appeal. He was a small man, whose demure and spinster-like demeanor led new acquaintances to ask him plumply how on earth he had managed to get his D.S.O.

"There were chances," he would reply to these querists, "to be had out there," waving his hand vaguely in the direction of South Africa, "and I saw one of them and took it—that's all."

Others might pump him more successfully to the effect that he—Galahad Ranking—was a poor devil of a militiaman attached to the Royal Deershores; that a small detachment of that well-known territorial regiment, garrisoned in a beastly small tin-pot fort on the Springbok River, Eastern Transvaal, were by Boers besieged; that relief was urgently necessary; and that "one of the fellows went and brought up Kitchener." Said fellow admitted upon further cross-examination to have been himself. But for such details as that the bringing up involved a six-mile run in scorching sun over tangled bush veldt, crossing the enemy's lines, being sniped at by Boer sharpshooters and chased by Boer pickets, the curious must refer to despatches. Stamping Army mules would not trample the truth out of the man.

He wrung half-hearted leave of absence from the powers that were, and his orderly packed the battered tin suit-case and the Gladstone bag that had spent three days at the bottom of a water-hole, and, having had its numerous labels soaked off, bore a painfully leprous appearance.

He found Laura's omnibus automobile, with its luggage tender, waiting at Cholsford Junction, and smiled

his dry little smile, mentally comparing the dimensions of the vehicle with the size of the guest. The suit-case and the Gladstone bag made a poor show; but there were other things to come: huge packages from the Stores, and a sea-weedy hamper from Great Fishby, and some cases of champagne with the label of a first-class Regent Street firm. "Poor Kingdom's wine-merchants!" Ranking said to himself, and he blinked in a bewildered way at a band-box of mammoth proportions and three dressmakers' boxes of stout cardboard with tin corners, their covers bearing the flourishing signature of *Babin et Cie*. Because, you know, Laura's bereavement was so very recent, and bachelors of Galahad's type have a somewhat exaggerated notion of the extent to which conjugal mourners are expected to bewail themselves. However, even a widow requires clothes. This handsome concession to feminine idiosyncrasy made, Galahad ousted Laura's chauffeur from the driving-seat, and, assuming the steering-wheel, was reaching for the starting-lever when the chauffeur stopped him with—

"Beg pardon, sir, but there's a gentleman to fetch."

"A visitor to The Rodelands?" Galahad asked, with furrows of surprise forming below his hat-brim.

The mechanic, a gloomy young man in a gold-banded cap, with a weakness for wearing waterproofs in the driest weather, replied, without a groom's alertness or a groom's civility:

"It's a gentleman staying at Eyot Cottage. . . ." Adding, as Galahad faintly recalled the creeper-covered cot in question, modestly perched on the edge of a marshy lawn running down to the river, and usually let by the landlord of the local hotel to honeymooning couples: "And we usually give him a lift."

As the chauffeur spoke, the gentleman emerged from the dim, echoing archway through which the down platform disgorged. The stranger was young—Galahad,

who was middle-aged, saw that at a glance—and fair, while Galahad was sandy. He wore a suit of gray tweeds too short in the sleeves and trouser-legs, and his cherubically pink countenance, adorned with large, round, china-blue eyes and a little flaxen mustache, was carried at an altitude which would have been disconcerting to a Lifeguardsman of six feet high, and was simply maddening to Galahad, who could only be categorized as small. We are all human, and Galahad was secretly gratified to observe that the young giant's shoulders boasted a graceful droop, and that his chest was somewhat narrow.

“Hullo, Watson!” observed the tall young gentleman, condescendingly; and Watson smiled faintly and actually touched his cap as the newcomer favored Galahad with a long and round-eyed stare.

“I believe you are coming with us?” said Galahad, raising his hat with punctilious politeness.

“Not inside, thanks,” was the long-legged young stranger's reply. He stared harder than ever, and Watson murmured in Galahad's ear that the gentleman usually drove.

“Does he?” ejaculated the astonished Galahad.

A man may hold the rank of captain in one of his Majesty's territorial Regiments, and yet be shy; may have earned the right to adorn his thorax with the D.S.O., and yet be bashful; may be a more than efficient instructor in Musketry, and yet shrink from the gratuitous schooling of underbred youth in the amenities of good breeding. In less time than it takes to relate it, Galahad was stowed in the omnibus body of the “Runhard” where, a very little kernel in a very roomy shell, he rattled about as the familiar landscape reeled giddily by at the will and pleasure of the long-legged young gentleman, who might be described as the kind of driver that takes risks. A peculiarly steep and curving

hill announced by signboards lettered, in appropriate crimson, "Dangerous!" afforded facilities for the exercise of his peculiar talent which temporarily deprived the inside passenger of breath.

The river lay at the bottom of the hill, and the dwelling of Mrs. Kingdom, described in the local guide as "an elegant riparian villa," sat in its green meadows and sunny croquet lawns and rose-trellised gardens, on the other side.

The automobile swirled in at the lodge-gates, stopped, and Galahad got out, welcomed by the joyful barking of Dinmonts, fox-terriers, pugs, and poodles.

Knee-deep in dogs, the little man responded to the respectful greeting of Laura's butler, a meek, gray-faced, little, elderly personage with a frill of white whiskers akin to the hirsute adornments of the rare variety of the howling ape. Then the drawing-room door swung open, letting out an avalanche of Pomeranians and some Persian cats; Laura rose from a sofa and advanced with a gushful greeting. Her outstretched hands were grasped by Galahad; he was tinglingly conscious that her widow's weeds were eminently becoming.

"Dear Captain Ranking, how sweet of you to run down!" Laura cooed. The flash of admiration in Galahad's weary gray eyes gave her sugared assurance that she was looking her best; his ardent squeeze confirmed the look.

"You used to call me by my Christian name," he was saying, with a little undulating wobble of sentiment in his voice. Then his glance went past Mrs. Kingdom, and his lean under-jaw dropped. The long-legged gentleman in gray tweed, who had driven, or rather hustled, him from the station, was sitting on the sofa in a suit of blue serge. No, Galahad was not mistaken. There were the long legs, the champagne-bottle shoulders, the china-blue eyes, and the little flaxen mustache. He

did not look so pink, that was all. And when Laura, with a nervous giggle, introduced him as Mr. Lasher, he began getting up from the sofa as though he never would have done.

"How do?" he said, when his yellow head had soared to the ceiling.

"Met you before," said Galahad with some terseness. "And you frightened me abominably by the way you scorched down Penniford Hill."

The long-legged young man stared with circular blue eyes. Laura burst into a peal of rippling laughter, which struck Galahad as being forced and beside the point.

"My dear Galahad," Mrs. Kingdom cried, "you must have met Brosy! This is Dosy," she added, as though all were now clear, and welcomed with a perfect *feu de joie* of giggles the entrance of the veritable and original young man in gray tweeds who had driven the automobile, and now came strolling into the drawing-room. Then she introduced the pair formally to Captain Ranking as Mr. Theodosius and Mr. Ambrose Lasher, and rustled away to pour out tea, leaving Galahad in a jaundiced frame of mind. For one thing, he hated to be mystified; for another, being an ordinary, though heroic, human being, he had taken at the first moment of encounter a singularly ardent and sincere dislike to the "long-legged, blue-eyed young bounder," as he mentally termed Mr. Brosy Lasher; and the discovery that the object of his loathing existed in duplicate was not a welcome one. He was dry, stiff, and jerky in his responses to the loud and patronizing advances of the two Lashers. Fortunately the twin young gentlemen accepted as admiration, what was, in fact, the opposite sentiment. They had been used to a good deal of this since the first moment of their simultaneous entrance upon this mundane stage, and they were twenty-six.

"It is so sad," Laura said in confidential aside to Galahad. "They have lost both parents, and have hardly a penny in the world." She raised and crumpled her still pretty eyebrows with the old infantile air of appeal. "Two such delightful boys, and so handsome! . . . though to my eye Brosy's nose is less purely Greek in outline than Dosity's. And they were educated at a public school, with every advantage that a rich man's sons might naturally expect. But, of course, you recognized the *cachet* of Eton at once?"

"I notice," said Ranking drily, "that they both leave the lower button of their waistcoats undone, and call men whom they don't like 'scugs.'" His quiet eye dwelt with dubious tenderness upon the Messrs. Lasher, who were romping with the dogs upon the sofas, and devouring cake and strawberries with infantile greed. "I have heard of the Eton manner, of course," he added, "and I meet a good many Eton-bred men; but I can't say that these young fellows have any—any special characteristics in common with—ah—those."

"They belong to a grand old family," Laura continued, with an air of proprietorship that puzzled Galahad. "The Lashers of Dropshire, you know—quite historical. And their father ran through everything before they came of age. So thoughtless, wasn't it? And now they are looking round for an opening in life, and really, they tell me, it is dreadfully difficult to find."

"I rather imagined as much," said Galahad, making a little point of sarcasm all to himself, and secretly smiling over it.

"I wonder if you could suggest anything; you are always so helpful," Laura went on. "That they must be together, of course, goes without saying. And that, of course, increases the difficulty. But nobody could be so inhuman as to part twins." Her lips quivered, and her eyes grew misty with unshed tears.

"My dear Laura," expostulated the puzzled Galahad, "you talk as though these two young men were six years old instead of six-and-twenty."

"How changed you are!" Laura blinked away a tear. "You used to understand me so much better in the old days. *Of course*, they are grown up, that is plain to the meanest capacity. But they have such boyish, charming, confiding natures. . . . Toto will bite, Brosy, if you hold him in the air by the tail! . . . that a woman like myself . . . If you would like some more cherry cake, Dosy, do ring the bell! . . . a woman like myself, married at eighteen to a man true and noble if you will, but incapable of awakening the deeper chords of passion and . . . Of course, you are both going to dine here and help me to entertain Captain Ranking! . . . denied the happiness of being a mother"—Laura drooped her eyes and bit her lip, and blushed slightly—"must naturally find their company a *great resource*. And the distant cousin with whom they are staying, a Mrs. Le Bacon Chalmers, who has taken Eyot Cottage for the summer months, *knows this* and *lends* them to me as *often* as I like."

"Upon my word, she is uncommonly kind!" said Galahad, with emphasis stronger than Laura's italics.

"Yes, isn't she?" responded Laura, whose sense of humor was obscured by predilection. "They ride and drive the horses, and give Holt and the gardeners advice, and they exercise the automobiles, and run the electric launch about, and play tennis and croquet——"

"And the devil generally!" were the words that Galahad bit off and gulped down.

He was very quiet at dinner, sitting in the deceased Kingdom's place at the foot of the table. And Dosy and Brosy were very loud and very large, though looking, it must be confessed, exceedingly well in evening garb. They made themselves very much at home upon

Laura's right and left hand, recommending certain dishes to each other, criticizing more, ravaging the bonbons, reveling in the dessert, calling, with artless airs of connoisseurship, for special wines laid down by the noble man who yet had not known how to awaken the deeper chords of passion.

"Gad! what a pair of hawbucks!" Galahad mentally ejaculated as the servants ran about like distracted ants; and Laura and Laura's inseparable though elderly companion-friend, Miss Glidding, vied with each other in encouraging Theodosius and Ambrose to renewed attacks upon the strawberries and peaches.

Left alone with Dossy and Brosy, he submitted to be patronized, offered cigars he had chosen, recommended to try liqueurs with whose liverish and headachy qualities he had been acquainted of old.

They walked with the ladies in the dewy rose-gardens after dinner, and as Galahad paused to light a cigar, behold, he was left alone. Laura with Brosy, Miss Glidding (who looked her best by bat-light) with Dossy, had vanished in the shadowy windings of the trellis-walks and arcades. And Captain Ranking, shrugging his shoulders, picked a half-seen Niphetos, glimmering among the wet, shining leaves, and walked back to the smoking-room, wondering why on earth Laura had dragged him down where he seemed least to be wanted. What was the matter "affecting her whole future" upon which she required advice? His heart gave a sickening little jog as he realized that the future of Dossy, or possibly of Brosy, might also be involved. True, Laura was thirty-nine; but what are years when the heart is young? Galahad asked himself, as peal after peal of the widow's laughter broke the silence of the scented night. Other mental interrogations fretted his aching brain. What must the servants not have thought and said? What would the neighbors say? What would the County think

of such sportive, not to say frivolous, conduct on the part of a widow but recently emancipated from weepers, whose handkerchiefs were still bordered with the inch-deep inky deposit of conjugal woe?

Kingdom was an easy-going, level-headed man, Galahad admitted, biting at one of the deceased's Havanas and frowning; "but he would have raised the Devil over this. Possibly he's doing it."

The portrait of Mr. Kingdom over the mantelshelf of the smoking-room seemed to scowl confirmatively. The servants were all in bed, the promenaders in the garden showed no signs of returning. Galahad shrugged his little shoulders, and went away to bed in a charming, drum-windowed, chintz-hung bower over the front porch. And just as his little cropped head plumped down on the pillow it was electrically jolted up again. Laura was saying good-night in the porch to one—or was it both?—of the infernal twins. And before the hall-door clashed they had promised to come over to lunch to-morrow. Confound them! it was to-morrow now.

One has only to add that when, after exhausting watches, slumber visited Galahad's eyelids, the twins in maddening iteration played dominoes throughout his dreams, to convince the reader that they had thoroughly got upon his nerves.

Laura, looking wonderfully fresh and young in a lace morning *négligé* of the peek-a-boo description, poured out his coffee at breakfast and sympathized with him about the headache he denied. Then, shaded by a fluffy black-and-white sunshade, the widow led Galahad out into the sunny garden to a tree-shaded and sequestered nook where West Indian hammocks hung, and, installing herself in one of these receptacles, invited her husband's cousin to repose himself in another.

Lying on your back, counting ripening plums dangling from green branches above, oscillating at the bidding

of the lightest breeze, liable to upset at the slightest movement, it is difficult to be indignant and sarcastic; but Galahad was both.

“Adopt these young men as sons, my dear Laura! Are there no parentless babies in the local workhouse that would better supply the need you express of having something to cherish and love?” exclaimed Galahad.

He sat up with an effort and stared at Laura. Laura rocked, prone amid cushions, knitting a silk necktie of a tender hue suited to a blonde complexion.

“Workhouse babies are invariably ugly, and unhealthy into the bargain,” she pouted.

“Some orphan child from a Home, that is pretty to look at and has had the distemper properly,” suggested Galahad.

“I don’t want an orphan from a Home,” objected Laura. “Besides, it wouldn’t be a twin.”

“There are such things as twin orphans, my dear Laura,” protested Galahad.

But Laura was firm.

“Dosy and Brosy are very, very dear to me,” she protested, a little pinkness about the eyelids and nostrils threatening an impending tear-shower. “They came into my life,” she continued poetically, “at a time of sorrow and bereavement, and the sunshine of their presence drove the dark clouds away. Of course, they are too old, or, rather, not young enough, to be really my sons,” she continued, “but they might have been poor Tom’s.”

“If poor Tom had fathered a brace of bounders like those,” burst out Galahad, “poor Tom would have kicked himself—that’s all I know—kicked himself!” he repeated, fuming and climbing out of his hammock.

“Pray don’t be coarse,” entreated Laura—“and abusive,” she added, as an afterthought. “Of course, as poor Tom’s trustee and executor, I am bound to make

a show of consulting you, though my mind is really made up, and nobody can prevent my doing what I like with my own income. I shall allow the boys five hundred a year each for pocket money," she added with a pretty maternal air. "And Dosy shall go into the Diplomatic Service, and Brosy——"

"You have broached the adoption plan to them then?" gasped Galahad. Laura bowed her head. "And this relative with whom I gather they are now staying," he continued, "is she agreeable to the proposed arrangement?"

"Mrs. Le Bacon Chalmers? She couldn't prevent it if she wasn't!" retorted Laura, "as the boys are of age. But, as it happens, she thinks the plan an ideal one."

"That proves the value of her judgment, certainly. And the County? Will your friends and neighbors also think the plan an ideal one?" demanded Galahad.

"My friends and neighbors," said Laura, loftily, "will think as I do, or they will cease to be my friends."

Galahad, usually punctiliously well-mannered, whistled long and dismally. "Phew! And when you have alienated every soul upon your visiting list, what will you do for society?"

"I shall have the boys," said Laura, with defiant tenderness.

"And when the 'boys,' as you call them, marry?" insinuated Galahad.

Laura sat up so suddenly that all her cushions rolled out of the hammock. "If this is how you treat me when I turn to you for advice——" she began.

"Laura," said Galahad firmly, "you don't want advice." He held up his lean brown hand and checked her, as she would have spoken. "Nor do you require twin sons of six feet three. What you want is——" He was going in his innocence to say "a sincere and candid friend," and prove himself the ideal by some

plain speaking, but Laura fairly brimmed over with conscious blushes.

“How—how can you?” she said, in vibrating tones of reproach, devoid of even a shade of anger. “So soon, too! As if I did not know what was due to poor Tom——”

The toot of a motor-horn, the scuffle of the engine, the dry whirr of the brake as the locomotive stopped at the avenue gate, broke in upon her heroics.

“Here are the boys,” she cried rapturously, and, indeed, hopped out of the hammock with the agility of girlhood as the long-legged, yellow-haired twins came stalking over the grass. She held out her hands to them with a pretty maternal gesture.

“Dosy pet, Brosy darling,” she babbled, “come and kiss Mummy! We have been telling all our little plans to Uncle Galahad, and Uncle quite agrees.”

“No! Does he, though?” was the simultaneous utterance of the long-legged twins. They twirled their yellow mustaches, stooped awkwardly and “kissed Mummy,” as Galahad uttered a yell of frenzied laughter, and, throwing himself recklessly into his recently-vacated hammock, shot out upon the other side.

He went back to Hounslow that day. Dosy and Brosy dutifully accompanied him to the station, and exchanged a fraternal wink when his train steamed out.

“What an infatuation!” he groaned. In his mind’s eye he saw the County grinning over the childless widow and her adopted twins. As for Dosy and Brosy, they would have what in America is termed “a soft snap.” Powerful jaws had both the young gentlemen, wide and greedy gullets. Still, with his mind’s eye Galahad saw their foolish, affectionate, sentimental benefactress gnawed to the bare bone. Day by day he anticipated a letter of shrill astonishment from his co-trustee, and when it came, hinting at mental weakness

and the necessity of restraint, he flamed up into defense of Laura so hotly as to surprise himself.

And then, before anything decisive had been done with regard to the settlement—before Brosy and Dosy had taken up their quarters for good beneath the roof of their adopted parent—a change befell, and Galahad received an imploring note from Mrs. Kingdom soliciting his instant presence upon “an urgent matter.”

“She has thought better of it,” said Galahad to himself, as he obeyed the summons. “Her native good sense”—you will realize that the man must have been genuinely in love to believe in Laura’s native good sense—“has come to her aid!” And in his mind’s eye he beheld the long, narrow backs of the twins walking away into a dim perspective.

It was September. Dosy and Brosy were shooting the widow’s partridges, and Galahad found her alone. She was pleased and excited, with an air of one who with difficulty keeps the cork in a bottle of mystery; and when she clasped her hands round Galahad’s arm and told him what a true, true friend he was! he felt absurdly tender, as he begged her to confide her trouble to him.

“I have made such a dreadful discovery,” Laura gasped, dabbing her eyes with a filmy little square of cambric edged with the narrowest possible line of black, “about the—about the boys.”

Galahad strove to compose his features into an expression of decent regret.

“Mr. Ambrose and Mr. Theodosius Lasher. . . . I rather anticipated that you—that possibly there were discoveries to be made.” He turned his weary gray eyes upon Laura, and pulled at one wiry end of his little gingery mustache. “Have they done anything very bad?” he asked, and his tone was not uncheerful.

“Bad!” echoed Laura, with indignant scorn. “As though two young men gifted with natures like theirs”

—she had left off calling them “boys,” Galahad noticed—“so lofty, so noble, so unselfish—and yes, I will say it, so pure!—could possibly be guilty of any bad or even doubtful action. But you do not know them, and you are prejudiced; you must admit you are prejudiced when you hear the—the truth.” The cork escaped, and the secret came with it in a gush. “It is this: I cannot be a mother to Dossy and Brosy; they, poor dears, cannot be my sons. I had not the least idea of their true feeling with regard to me, nor had they, until quite recently.” She swallowed a little sob and dabbed her eyes again. “Oh, Galahad, they are madly in love with me, both of them. What, what am I to do?”

“Send them to the devil, the impudent young beggars!” snorted Galahad. And, striding up and down between the trembling china-tables with clenched fists and angry eyes, he said all the things he had longed to say about folly, and madness and infatuation.

A woman will always submit with a good grace to masculine upbraiding when she has reason to believe the upbraider jealous. Laura bore his reproaches with saintly sweetness.

“They have behaved in the most honorable way, poor darlings!” she protested, “though the realization of the true nature of their feelings towards me, of course, came as a terrible shock. The deeds of settlement had been drawn up. We planned, as soon as everything had been sealed and signed, that the dear boys were to come and live here. I had furnished their bedrooms exactly alike, and fitted up the smoking-room with twin arm-chairs, twin tobacco-tables, and so on, when the blow fell.” She deepened her voice to a thrilling whisper. “Dossy, looking quite pale and tragic, asked for an interview in the conservatory; Brosy begged for a private word in the pavilion at the end of the upper croquet-lawn. And then,” said Laura, shedding abundant tears, “I knew

what I had done. It did occur to me that I might—might marry Brosy and adopt Dosy as my son, or marry Dosy and regard Brosy as an heir. But no, it could not be. Dosy proposed to take poison, or shoot himself, in the most unselfish way; and Brosy suggested going in for a swim too soon after breakfast, and never rising from a dive again. But neither could endure to live to see me the bride of the other," sobbed Laura.

"And as this is England, and not Malabar," uttered Galahad, dryly, "the law is against your marrying both."

"Why, of course, my dear Galahad," cried Laura innocently, scandalized and round-eyed.

The man who really loved her looked at her and forgave her foolishness. She had set the County buzzing with the tale of her absurd infatuation; she had compromised her dignity by the tragic follies of the past few months; there was but one way of gagging the scandalmongers and regaining lost ground, one way of getting out of the *impasse*. Galahad pointed out that way, as Laura entreated him to suggest something.

"Why not marry me?" he said bluntly.

"Oh, Galahad!" cried Laura, bright-eyed and quite pleasantly thrilled. "And then we can both adopt the boys."

"Whether they embrace that idea or not," said Galahad, with his arm round the long-coveted waist, "remains to be seen. But I promise you, if occasion should arise, that I will act as a father to them."

He went out, in his new parental character, to look for Dosy and Brosy and break the joyful news. His freckled little face was beaming with smiles, his usually weary gray eyes were alight; he smiled under his bristly little mustache as he selected a stout but stinging Malacca cane from the late Thompson Kingdom's collection in the hall. . . .

A DISH OF MACARONI

ON the occasion of the tenth biennial visit of the Carlo Da Capo Grand Opera Combination to the musical, if murky, city of Smutchester, the principal members of the company pitched their tents, as was their wont, at the Crown Diamonds Hotel, occupying an entire floor of that capacious caravanserie, whose *chef*, to the grief of many honest British stomachs and the unrestrained joy of these artless children of song, was of cosmopolitan gifts, being an Italian-Spanish-Swiss-German. Here *prime donne*, tenors, and bassos could revel in national dishes from which their palates had long been divorced, and steaming masses of yellow polenta, *knüdels*, and *borsch*, heaped dishes of sausages and red cabbage, ragouts of cockscombs and chicken-livers, veal stewed with tomatoes, frittura of artichokes, with other culinary delicacies strange of aspect and garlicky as to smell, loaded the common board at each meal, only to vanish like the summer snow, so seldom seen but so constantly referred to by the poetical fictionist, amidst a Babel of conversation which might only find its parallel in the parrot-house at the Zoo. Ringed hands plunged into salad-bowls; the smoke of cigarettes went up in the intervals between the courses; the meerschaum-colored lager of Munich, the yellow beer of Bass, the purple Chianti, or the vintage of Epernay brimmed the glasses; and the coffee that crowned the banquet was black and thick and bitter as the soul of a singer who has witnessed the triumph of a rival.

For singers can be jealous: and the advice of Dr.

Watts is more at discount behind the operatic scenes, perhaps, than elsewhere. For women may be, and are, jealous of other women; and men may be, and are, jealous of men, off the stage; but it is reserved for the hero and heroine of the stage to be jealous of one another. The glare of the footlights, held by so many virtuous persons to be inimical to the rosebud of innocence, has a curiously wilting and shriveling effect upon the fine flower of chivalry. Signor Alberto Fumaroli, *primo uomo*, and possessor of a glorious tenor, was possessed by the idea that the chief soprano, De Melzi, the enchanting Teresa—still in the splendor of her youth, with ebony tresses, eyes of jet, skin of ivory, an almost imperceptible mustache, and a figure of the most seductive, doomed ere long to expand into a pronounced *embonpoint*—had adorned her classic temples with laurels which should by rights have decked his own. The press-cuttings of the previous weeks certainly balanced in her favor. Feeble-minded musical critics, of what the indignant tenor termed “provincial rags,” lauded the Signora to the skies. She was termed a “springing fountain of crystal song,” a “human bulbul in the rose-garden of melody.” Eulogy had exhausted itself upon her; while he, Alberto Fumaroli, the admired of empresses, master of the emotions of myriads of American millionairesses, he was fobbed off with half a dozen patronizing lines. Glancing over the paper in the saloon carriage, he had seen the impertinent upper lip of the De Melzi, tipped with the faintest line of shadow, curl with delight as she scanned each accursed column in turn, and handed the paper to her aunt (a vast person invariably clad in the tightest and shiniest of black satins, and crowned with a towering hat of violet velvet adorned with once snowy plumes and crushed crimson roses), who went everywhere with her niece, and mounted guard over the exchequer. Outwardly calm as Vesuvius,

and cool as a Neapolitan ice on a hot day, the outraged Alberto endured the triumph of the women, marked the subterranean chuckles of the stout Signora, the mischievous enjoyment of Teresa; pulled his Austrian-Tyrolese hat over his Corsican brows, and vowed a wily *vendetta*. His opportunity for wreaking retribution would come at Smutchester, he knew. Wagner was to be given at the Opera House, and as great as the previous triumph of Teresa de Melzi in the rôle of Elsa—newly added by the soprano to her *repertoire*—should be her fall. *Evviva!* Down with that fatally fascinating face, smiling so provokingly under its laurels! She should taste the consequences of having insulted a Neapolitan. And the tenor smiled so diabolically that Zamboni, the basso, sarcastically inquired whether Fumaroli was rehearsing *Mephistofole*?

“Not so, dear friend,” Fumaroli responded, with a dazzling show of ivories. “In that part I should make a *bel fiasco*; I have no desire to emulate a basso or a bull. . . . But in this—the rôle in which I am studying to perfect myself—I predict that I shall achieve a dazzling success.” He drew out a green Russia-leather cigarette case, adorned with a monogram in diamonds. “It is permitted that one smokes?” he added, and immediately lighted up.

“It is permitted, if I am to have one also.”

The De Melzi stretched a white, bejeweled hand out, and the seething Alberto, under pain of appearing openly impolite, was forced to comply. “No, I will not take the cigarette you point out,” said the saucy *prima donna*, as the tenor extended the open case. “It might disagree with me, who knows? and I have predicted that in the part of Elsa to-morrow night at Smutchester I shall achieve a ‘dazzling success.’” And she smiled with brilliant malice upon Alberto Fumaroli, who played Lohengrin. “They are discriminating—the audiences of

that big, black, melancholy place—they never mistake geese for swans.”

“*Ach, no!*” said the Impresario, looking up from his tatting—he was engaged upon a green silk purse for Madame Da Capo, a wrinkled little doll of an old lady with whom he was romantically in love. “They will not take a *dournure*, some declamation, and half a dozen notes in the upper register *bour dout botage*. Sing to them well, they will be ready to give you their heads. But sing to them badly, and they will be ready to pelt yours. Twenty years ago they did. I remember a graceless impostor, a *ragazzo* (foisted upon me for a season by a villain of an agent), who annoyed them in *Almariva*. . . . *Ebbene!* the elections were in progress—there was a *dimonstranza*. I can smell those antique eggs, those decomposed oranges, now.”

“Heart’s dearest, thou must not excite thyself,” interrupted Madame; “it is so bad for thee. Play at the poker-game, *mes enfants*,” she continued, “and leave my good child, my beloved little one, alone!” Saying this, Madame drew from her vast under-pocket a neat case containing an ivory comb, and, removing the fearfully and wonderfully braided traveling cap of the Impresario, fell to combing his few remaining hairs until, soothed by the process, Carlo, who had been christened Karl, fell asleep with his head on Madame’s shoulder; snoring peacefully, despite the screams, shrieks, howls, and maledictions which were the invariable accompaniment of the poker-game.

The train bundled into Smutchester some hours later; a string of cabs conveyed the Impresario, his wife, and the principal members of his company to the Crown Diamonds Hotel. Before he sought his couch that night the revengeful Alberto Fumaroli had interviewed the *chef* and bribed him with the gift of a box of regalias from the cedar smoking-cabinet of a King, to aid in

the carrying-out of the *vendetta*. Josebattista Funkmuller was not a regal judge of cigars; but these were black, rank, and oily enough to have made an Emperor most imperially sick. Besides, the De Melzi had, or so he declared, once ascribed an indigestion which had ruined, or so she swore, one of her grandest *scenas*, to an omelette of his making, and the cook was not unwilling that the haughty spirit of the *cantatrice* should be crushed. His complex nature, his cosmopolitan origin, showed in the plan Josebattista Funkmuller now evolved and placed before the revengeful tenor, who clasped him to his bosom in an ecstasy of delight, planting at the same time a huge, resounding kiss upon both his cheeks.

“It is perfection!” Fumaroli cried. “My friend, it can scarcely fail! If it should, *per Bacco!* the Fiend himself is upon that insolent creature’s side! But I never heard yet of his helping a woman to resist temptation—*oh, mai!* it is he who spreads the board and invites Eve.”

And the tenor retired exultant. His sleeping-chamber was next door to that of the hated *cantatrice*. He dressed upon the succeeding morning to the accompaniment of *roulades* trilled by the owner of the lovely throat to which Fumaroli would so willingly have given the fatal squeeze. And as Fumaroli, completing his frugal morning ablutions by wiping his beautiful eyes and classic temples very gingerly with a damp towel, paused to listen, a smile of peculiar malignancy was only partly obscured by the folds of the towel. But when the tenor and the soprano encountered at the twelve o’clock *déjeuner*, Fumaroli’s politeness was excessive, and his large, dark, brilliant eyes responded to every glance of the gleaming black orbs of De Melzi with a languorous, melting significance which almost caused her heart to palpitate beneath her Parisian corsets. Concealed pas-

sion lay, it might be, behind an affectation of enmity and ill-will.

“*Mai santo cielo!*” exclaimed the stout aunt, to whom the *cantatrice* subsequently revealed her suspicions, “thou guessest always as I myself have thought. The unhappy man is devoured by a grand passion for my Teresa. He grinds his teeth, he calls upon the saints, he grows more bilious every day, and thou more beautiful. One day he will declare himself——”

“And I shall lose an entertaining enemy, to find a stupid lover,” gurgled Teresa. She was looking divine, her dark beauty glowing like a gem in the setting of an Eastern silk of shot turquoise and purple, fifty yards of which an enamored noble of the Ukraine had thrown upon the stage of the Opera House, St. Petersburg, wound round the stem of a costly bouquet. She glanced in the mirror as she kissed the black nose of her Japanese pug. “Every man becomes stupid after a while,” she went on. “Even Josebattista is in love with me. He sends me a little note written on *papier jambon* to entreat an interview.”

“My soul!” cried the stout aunt, “thou wilt not deny him?”

The saucy singer shook her head as Funkmuller tapped at the door. One need not give in detail the interview that eventuated. It is enough that the intended treachery of Fumaroli was laid bare. His intended victim laughed madly.

“But it is a *cerotto*—what the English call a nincompoop,” she gasped, pressing a laced handkerchief to her streaming eyes. “If the heavens were to fall, then one could catch larks; but the proverb says nothing about nightingales.”

She tossed her brilliant head and took a turn or two upon the hotel sitting-room carpet, considering.

“I will keep this appointment,” said she.

“*Dio!* And risk thy precious reputation?” shrieked the aunt.

“Chi sa? Chi sa?
Evviva l’opportunita!”

hummed the provoking beauty. And she dealt the cook a sparkling glance of such intelligence that he felt Signor Alberto would never triumph. Relieved in mind, Josebattista Funkmuller took his leave.

“I will return the King’s cigars,” he said, as he pressed his garlic-scented mustache to the pearly knuckles of the lady.

“Bah!” said she, “they were won in a raffle at Vienna.”

The door closed upon the disgusted *chef*, and reopened ten minutes later to admit a waiter carrying upon a salver a pretty three-cornered pink note with a gold monogram in the corner. The writer entreated the inestimable privilege of three minutes’ conversation with Madame de Melzi in a private apartment in the basement of the hotel. He did not propose to visit the *prima donna* in her own rooms, even under the wing of her aunt, for it was of supreme importance that tongues should not be set wagging. Delicacy and respect prevented him from suggesting an interview in the apartments occupied by himself. On the neutral ground of an office in the basement the interview might take place without comment or interruption. He was, in fact, waiting there for an answer.

The answer came in the person of the singer herself, charmingly dressed and radiant with loveliness.

“Fie! What an underground hole! The window barred, the blank wall of an area beyond it!” Her beautiful nostrils quivered. “*Caro mio*, you have in that covered dish upon the table there something that smells good. What is under the cover?”

“Look and see!” said the cunning tenor, with a provoking smile.

“I am not curious,” responded Teresa, putting both hands behind her and leaning her back against the door. “Come, hurry up! One of your three minutes has gone by, the other two will follow, and I shall be obliged to take myself off without having heard this mysterious revelation. What is it?” She showed a double row of pearl-hued teeth in a mischievous smile. “Shall I guess? You have, by chance, fallen in love with me, and wish to tell me so? How dull and unoriginal! A vivacious, interesting enemy is to be preferred a million times before a stupid friend or a commonplace adorer.”

“*Grazie a Dio!*” said the tenor, “I am not in love with you.” But at that moment he was actually upon the verge; and the dull, dampish little basement room, floored with kamptulicon warmed by a grudging little gas-stove, its walls adorned with a few obsolete and hideous prints, its oilcloth-covered table, on which stood the mysterious dish, closely covered, bubbling over a spirit lamp and flanked by a spoon, fork, and plate—that little room might have been the scene of a declaration instead of a punishment had it not been for the De Melzi’s amazing nonchalance. It would have been pleasant to have seen the spiteful little arrow pierce that lovely bosom. But instead of frowning or biting her lips, Teresa laughed with the frankest grace in the world.

“Dear Signor Alberto, Heaven has spared you much. Besides, you are of those who esteem quantity above quality—and, for a certain thing, I should be torn to pieces by the ladies of the Chorus.” She shrugged her shoulders. “Well, what is this mysterious communication? The three minutes are up, the fumes of a gas fire are bad for the throat—and I presume you of all

people would not wish me to sing 'Elsa' with a veiled voice, and disappoint the dear people of Smutchester, and Messieurs the critics, who say such kind things."

Alberto Fumaroli's brain spun round. Quick as thought his supple hand went out; the wrist of the coquettish *prima donna* was imprisoned as in a vise of steel.

"*Ragazza!*" he gnashed out, "you shall pay for your cursed insolence." He swung the *cantatrice* from the door, and Teresa, noting the convulsed workings of his Corsican features, and devoured by the almost scorching glare of his fierce eyes, felt a thrill of alarm.

"*Oimè!* Signor," she faltered, "what do you mean by this violence? Recollect that we are not now upon the stage."

A harsh laugh came from the bull throat of the tenor.

" By mystic Love
Brought from the distance
In thy hour of need.
Behold me, O Elsa!
Loveliest, purest—
Thine own
Unknown!"

he hummed. But his Elsa did not entreat to flow about his feet like the river, or kiss them like the flowers blooming amidst the grasses he trod. Struggling in vain for release from the rude, unchivalrous grasp, an idea came to her; she stooped her beautiful head and bit Lohengrin smartly on the wrist, evoking, instead of further music, a torrent of curses; and as Alberto danced and yelled in agony, she darted from the room. With the key she had previously extracted she locked the door; and as her light footsteps and crisping draperies retreated along the passage, the tenor realized that he was caught in his own trap. Winding his handkerchief about his

smarting wrist, he bestowed a few more hearty curses upon Teresa, and sat down upon a horsehair-covered chair to wait for deliverance. They could not possibly give "Lohengrin" without him—there was no understudy for the part. For her own sake, therefore, the De Melzi would see him released in time to assume the armor of the Knight of the Swan. *Ebbene!* There was nothing to do but wait. He looked at his watch, a superb timepiece encrusted with brilliants. Two o'clock! And the opera did not commence until eight. Six hours to spend in this underground hole, if no one came to let him out. Patience! He would smoke. He got over half an hour with the aid of the green cigarette-case. Then he did a little pounding at the door. This bruised his tender hands, and he soon left off and took to shouting. To the utmost efforts of his magnificent voice no response was made; the part of the hotel basement in which his prison happened to be situated was, in the daytime, when all the servants were engaged in their various departments, almost deserted. Therefore, after an hour of shouting, Fumaroli abandoned his efforts.

What was to be done? He could take a *siesta*, and did, extended upon two of the grim horsehair chairs with which the apartment was furnished. He slept excellently for an hour, and woke hungry.

Hungry! *Diavolo!* with what a raging hunger—an appetite of Gargantuan proportions, sharpened to the pitch of famine by the bubbling gushes of savory steam that jetted from underneath the cover of the mysterious dish still simmering over its spirit-lamp upon the table! He knew what that dish contained—his revenge, in fact. Well, it had missed fire, the *vendetta*. He who had devised the ordeal of temptation for Teresa found himself helpless, exposed to its fiendish seductions. Not that he would be likely to yield, *oh mai!* was it probable?

He banished the idea with a gesture full of superb scorn and a haughty smile. Never, a thousand times never! The cunning Teresa should be disappointed. That evening's performance should be attacked by him as ever, fasting, the voice of melody, the sonorous lungs, supported by an empty frame. *Cospetto!* how savory the smell that came from that covered dish! The unhappy tenor moved to the table, snuffed it up in nosefuls, thought of flinging the dish and its contents out of window—would have done so had not the window been barred.

"After all, perhaps she means to keep me here all night," he thought, and rashly lifted the dish-cover, revealing a vast and heaving plain of macaroni, over which little rills of liquid butter wandered. Parmesan cheese was not lacking to the dish, nor the bland juices of the sliced tomato, and, like the violet by the wayside, the modest garlic added its perfume to the distracting bouquet. Fumaroli was only human, though, as a tenor, divine. He had been shut up for four hours, fasting, in company with a dish of macaroni. . . . Ah, Heaven! he could endure no longer. . . . He drew up a chair, grasped fork and spoon—fell to. In the act of finishing the dish, he started, fancying that the silvery tinkle of a feminine laugh sounded at the keyhole. But his faculties were dulled by vast feeding; his anger, like his appetite, had lost its edge. With an effort he disposed of the last shreds of macaroni, the last trickle of butter; and at seven o'clock a waiter, who accidentally unlocked the door of the basement room, awakened a plethoric sleeper from heavy dreams.

"To the Opera House," was the listless direction he gave the driver of his hired brougham; as one in a dream he entered by the stage-door, and strode to his room.

The curtain had already risen upon grassy lowlands in the neighborhood of Antwerp. Henry, King of Ger-

many, seated under a spreading canvas oak, held court with military pomp. Frederic of Telramond, wizard husband of Ortrud, the witch, had stepped forward to accuse Elsa of the murder of her brother, Gottlieb; the King had cried, "Summon the maid!" and in answer to the command, amidst the blare of brass and the clashing of swords, the De Melzi, draped in pure white, followed by her ladies, and looking the picture of virginal innocence, moved dreamily into view:

" How like an angel!
He who accuses her
Must surely prove
This maiden's guilt."

Ah! had those who listened to the thrilling strains that poured from those exquisite lips but guessed, as Elsa described the appearance of her dream-defender, her shining Knight, and sank upon her knees in an ecstasy of passionate prayer, that the celestial deliverer was at that moment gasping in the agonies of indigestion!

" Let me behold
That form of light!"

entreated the maiden; and amidst the exclamations of the eight-part chorus the swan-drawn bark approached the bank; the noble, if somewhat fleshy, form of Alberto Fumaroli, clad from head to foot in silvery mail, stepped from it. . . . With lofty grace he waved his adieu to the swan, he launched upon his opening strain of unaccompanied melody. . . . Alas! how muffled, how farinaceous those once clarion tones! . . . In labored accents, amid the growing disappointment of the Smutchester audience, Lohengrin announced his mission to the King. As he folded the entranced Elsa to his oppressed bosom, crying:

“Elsa, I love thee!”

“She-devil, you have ruined me!” he hissed in the De Melzi’s ear.

“My hope, my solace,
My hero, I am thine!”

Teresa trilled in answer. And raising her love-illuminated, mischievously dancing eyes to her deliverer, breathed in his ear: “Try pepsin!”

“FREDDY & C^{IE}”

IT is always a perplexing question how to provide for younger sons, and the immediate relatives of the Honorable Freddy Foulkes had forfeited a considerable amount of beauty sleep in connection with the problem.

“My poor darling!” the Marchioness of Glanmire sighed one day, more in sorrow than in anger, when the Honorable Freddy brought his charming smile and his graceful but unemployed person into her morning-room. “If you could only find some congenial and at the same time lucrative post that would take up your time and absorb your spare energy, how grateful I should be!”

“I have found it,” said the Honorable Freddy, with his cherubic smile. He possessed the blonde curling hair and artless expression that may be symbolical of guilelessness or the admirable mask of guile.

“Thank Heaven!” breathed his mother. Then, with a sense that the thanksgiving might, after all, be premature, she inquired: “But of what nature is this post? Before it can be seriously considered, one must be certain that it entails no loss of caste, demands nothing derogatory in the nature of service from one who—I need not remind you of your position, or of the fact that your family must be considered.”

She smoothed her darling’s silky hair, which exhaled the choicest perfume of Bond Street, and kissed his brow, as pure and shadowless as a slice of cream cheese, as the young man replied:

“Dearest mother, you certainly need not.”

“Then tell me of this post. Is it anything,” the Marchioness asked, “in the Diplomatic line?”

“Without a good deal of diplomacy a man would be no good for the shop,” admitted Freddy; “but otherwise, your guess is out.”

Doubt darkened his mother’s eyes.

“Don’t say,” she exclaimed, “that you have accepted a Club Secretaryship? To me it seems the last resource of the unsuccessful man.”

“It will never be mine,” said Freddy, “because I can’t keep accounts, and they wouldn’t have me. Try again.”

“I trust it has nothing to do with Art,” breathed the Marchioness, who loathed the children of canvas and palette with an unreasonable loathing.

“In a way it has,” replied her son, “and in another way it hasn’t. Come! I’ll give you a lead. There is a good deal of straw in the business for one thing.”

“You cannot contemplate casting in your lot with the agricultural classes? No! I knew the example of your unhappy cousin Reginald would prevent you from adopting so wild a course . . . but you spoke of straw.”

“Of straw. And flowers. And tulles.”

“Flowers and tools! Gardening is a craze which has become fashionable of late. But I cannot calmly see you in an apron, potting plants.”

“It is not a question of potting plants, but of potting customers,” said Freddy, showing his white teeth in a charming smile.

A shudder convulsed Freddy’s mother. Freddy went on, filially patting her handsome hand:

“You see, I have decided, and gone into trade. If I were a wealthy cad, I should keep a bucket-shop. Being a poor gentleman, I am going to make a bonnet-shop keep me. And, what is more—I intend to trim all the bonnets myself!”

There was no heart disease upon the maternal side of the house. The Marchioness did not become pale blue, and sink backwards, clutching at her corsage. She rose to her feet and boxed her son's right ear. He calmly offered the left one for similar treatment.

"Don't send me out looking uneven," he said simply. "If I pride myself upon anything, it is a well-balanced appearance. And I have to put in an hour or so at the shop by-and-by." He glanced in the mantel-mirror as he spoke, and observing with gratification that his immaculate necktie had escaped disarrangement, he twisted his little mustache, smiled, and knew himself irresistible.

"The shop! Degenerate boy!" cried his mother. "Who is your partner in this—this enterprise?"

"You know her by sight, I think," returned the cherub coolly. "Mrs. Vivianson, widow of the man who led the Doncaster Fusiliers to the top of Mealie Kop and got shot there. Awfully fetching, and as clever as they make them!"

"That woman one sees everywhere with a positive *procession* of young men at her heels!"

"That woman, and no other."

"She is hardly——"

"She is awfully *chic*, especially in mourning."

"I will admit she has some style."

"*Admit*, when you and all the other women have copied the color of her hair and the cut of her sleeves for three seasons past! I like that!"

Freddy was growing warm.

"When you accuse me of imitating the appearance of a person of that kind," said Lady Glanmire, in a cold fury, "you insult your mother. And when you ally yourself with her in the face of Society, as you are about to do, you are going too far. As to this millinery establishment, it shall not open."

“My dear mother,” said Freddy, “it has been open for a week.”

He drew a card from an exquisite case mounted in gold. On the pasteboard appeared the following inscription in neat characters of copperplate:—

FREDDY & C^{IE}
COURT MILLINERS,
11, CONDOVER STREET, W.

“Freddy and Company!” murmured the stricken parent, as she perused the announcement.

“Mrs. V. is company,” observed the son, with a spice of vulgarity; “and uncommonly good company, too. As for myself, my talents have at last found scope, and millinery is my *métier*. How often haven’t you said that no one has such exquisite taste in the arrangement of flowers——”

“As you, Freddy! It is true! But——”

“Haven’t you declared, over and over again, that you have never had a maid who could put on a mantle, adjust a fold of lace, or pin on a toque as skillfully as your own son?”

“My boy, I own it. Still, millinery as a profession? Can you call it *quite* manly for a man?”

“To spend one’s life in arranging combinations to set off other women’s complexions. Can you call that womanly for a woman? To my mind,” pursued Freddy, “it is the only occupation for a man of real refinement. To crown Beauty with beauty! To dream exquisite confections, which shall add the one touch wanting to exquisite youth or magnificent middle-age! To build up with deft touches a creation which shall betray in every detail, in every effect, the hand of a genius united to the soul of a lover, and reap not only gold, but glory! Would this not be Fame?”

"Ah! I no longer recognize you. You do not talk like your dear old self!" cried the Marchioness.

"I am glad of it," replied Freddy, "for, frankly, I was beginning to find my dear old self a bore." He drew out a watch, and his monogram and crest in diamonds scintillated upon the case. His eye gleamed with proud triumph as he said: "Ten to twelve. At twelve I am due at Condover Street. Come, not as my mother, if you are ashamed of my profession, but as a customer ashamed of that bonnet" (Lady Glanmire was dressed for walking), "which you ought to have given to your cook long ago. Unless you would prefer your own brougham, mine is at the door."

The vehicle in question bore the smartest appearance. The Marchioness entered it without a murmur, and was whirled to Condover Street. The name of Freddy & Cie. appeared in a delicate flourish of golden letters above the chastely-decorated portals of the establishment, and the plate-glass window contained nothing but an assortment of plumes, ribbons, chiffons, and shapes of the latest mode, but not a single completed article of head apparel.

The street was already blocked with carriages, the vestibule packed, the shop thronged with a vast and ever-increasing assemblage of women, amongst whom Lady Glanmire recognized several of her dearest friends. She wished she had not come, and looked for Freddy. Freddy had vanished. His partner, Mrs. Vivianson, a vividly-tinted, elegant brunette of some thirty summers, assisted by three or four charming girls, modestly attired and elegantly *coiffée*, was busily engaged with those would-be customers, not a few, who sought admission to the inner room, whose pale green *portière* bore in gold letters of embroidery the word *atelier*.

"You see," she was saying, "to the outer shop admission is *quite* free. We are charmed to see everybody

who likes to come, don't you know? and show them the latest shades and shapes and things. But consultation with Monsieur Freddy—we charge five shillings for that. Unusual? Perhaps. But Monsieur Freddy is Monsieur Freddy!” And her shrug was worthy of a Parisienne. “Why do you ask? ‘Is it true that he is the younger son of the Duke of Deershire?’ Dear Madame, to *us* he is Monsieur Freddy; and we seek no more.”

“A born tradeswoman!” thought Lady Glanmire, as the silver coins were exchanged for little colored silk tickets bearing mystic numbers. She moved forward and tendered two half-crowns; and Freddy's partner and Freddy's mother looked one another in the face. But Mrs. Vivianson maintained an admirable composure.

And then the curtains of the *atelier* parted, and a young and pretty woman came out quickly. She was charmingly dressed, and wore the most exquisite of hats, and a murmur went up at sight of it. She stretched out her hands to a friend who rushed impulsively to meet her, and her voice broke in a sob of rapture.

“Did you ever see anything so *sweet*? And he did it like magic—one scarcely saw his fingers move!” she cried; and her friend burst into exclamations of delight, and a chorus rose up about them.

“*Wonderful!*”

“*Extraordinary!*”

“*He does it while you wait!*”

“*Just for curiosity, I really must!*”

And a wave of eager women surged towards the green *portière*. Three went in, being previously deprived of their headgear by the respectful attendants, who averred that it put Monsieur Freddy's taste out of gear for the day to be compelled to gaze upon any creation other than his own. And then it came to the turn of Lady Glanmire.

She, disbonneted, entered the sanctum. A pale, clear,

golden light illumined it from above; the walls were hung with draperies of delicate pink, the carpet was moss-green. In the center of the apartment, upon a broad, low divan, reclined the figure of a slender young man. He wore a black satin mask, concealing the upper part of his face, a loose, lounging suit of black velvet, and slippers of the same with the embroidered initial "F." Round him stood, mute and attentive as slaves, some half-dozen pretty young women, bearing trays of trimmings of every conceivable kind. In the background rose a grove of stands supporting hat-shapes, bonnet-shapes, toque-foundations, the skeletons of every conceivable kind of headgear.

Silent, the Marchioness stood before her disguised son.

He gently put up his eyeglass, to accommodate which aid to vision his mask had been specially designed, and motioned her to the sitter's chair, so constructed that with a touch of Monsieur Freddy's foot upon a lever it would revolve, presenting the customer from every point of view. He touched the lever now, and chair and Marchioness spun slowly around. But for the presence of the young ladies with their trays of flowers, plumes, gauzes, and ribbons, Freddy's mother could have screamed. All the while Freddy remained silent, absorbed in contemplation, as though trying to fix upon his memory features seen for the first time. At last he spoke.

"Tall," he said, "and inclined to a becoming *embon-point*. The eyes blue-gray, the hair of auburn touched with silver, the features, of the Anglo-Roman type, somewhat severe in outline, the chin— A hat to suit this client"—he spoke in a sad, sweet, mournful voice—"would cost five guineas. A Marquise shape, of broad-tail"—one of the young lady attendants placed the shape required in the artist's hands—"the brim lined

with a rich drapery of chenille and silk. . . . Needle and thread, Miss Banks. Thank you. . . .” His fingers moved like white lightning as he deftly wielded the feminine implement and snatched his materials from the boxes proffered in succession by the girls. “Black and white tips of ostrich falling over one side from a ring of cut steel,” he continued in the same dreamy tone. “A knot of point d’Irlande, with a heart of Neapolitan violets, and”—he rose from the divan and lightly placed the beautiful completed fabric upon the Marchioness’s head—“here is your hat, Madame. Five guineas. Good-morning. Next, please!”

Emotion choked his mother’s utterance. At the same moment she saw herself in the glass silently swung towards her by one of the attendants, and knew that she was suited to a marvel. She made her exit, paid her five guineas, and returned home, embarrassed by the discovery that there was an artist in the family.

One thing was clear, no more was to be said. The *Maison Freddy* became the morning resort of the smart world; it was considered the thing to have hats made while Society waited. True, they came to pieces easily, not being copper-nailed and riveted, so to speak; but what poems they were! The charming conversation of Monsieur Freddy, the half-mystery that veiled his identity, as his semi-mask partially concealed his fair and smiling countenance, added to the attractions of the Condover Street *atelier*.

Money rolled in; the banking account of the partners grew plethoric; and then Mrs. Vivianson, in spite of the claims of the business upon her time, in spite of the Platonic standpoint she had up to the present maintained in her relations with Freddy, began to be jealous.

“Or—no! I will not admit that such a thing is possible!” she said, as she looked through some recent entries in the day-book of the firm. “But that American

millionairess girl comes too often. She has bought a hat every day for three weeks past. Good for business in one way, but bad for it in another. If he should marry, what becomes of the *Maison Freddy*?"

She sighed and passed between the curtains. It was the slack time after luncheon, and Freddy was enjoying a moment's interval. Stretched on his divan, his embroidered slippers elevated in the air, he smoked a perfumed cigarette surrounded by the materials of his craft. He smiled at Mrs. Vivianson as she entered, and then raised his aristocratic eyebrows in surprise.

"Has anything gone wrong? You swept in as tragically as my mother when she comes to disown me. She does it regularly every week, and as regularly takes me on again." He exhaled a scented cloud, and smiled once more.

"Freddy," said Mrs. Vivianson, going direct to the point, "this little speculation of ours has turned out very well, hasn't it?"

"Beyond dreams!" acquiesced Freddy. She went on: "You came to me a penniless detrimental, with a talent of which nobody guessed that anything could be made. I gave this gift a chance to develop. I set you on your legs, and——"

"*Me voici!* You don't want me to rise up and bless you, do you?" said Freddy, with half-closed eyes. "Thanks awfully, you know, all the same!"

"I don't know that I want thanks, quite," said Mrs. Vivianson. "I've had back every penny that I invested, and pulled off a bouncing profit. Your share amounts to a handsome sum. In a little while you'll be able to pay your debts."

"I shall never do that!" said Freddy, with feeling.

"Marry, and leave me—perhaps," went on Mrs. Vivianson. A shade swept over her face, her dark eyes glowed somberly, the lines of her mouth hardened.

“Keep as you are!” cried Freddy, rebounding to a sitting position on the divan.

“Where’s that new Medici shape in gold rice-straw and the amber *crêpe chiffon*, and the orange roses with crimson hearts?” His nimble fingers darted hither and thither, his eyes shone, and his cheeks were flushed with the enthusiasm of the artist. “A tuft of black and yellow cock’s feathers, *à la Mephistophele*,” he cried, “a topaz buckle, and it is finished. You must wear with it a *jabot* of yellow *point d’Alençon*. It is the hat of hats for a jealous woman!”

“How dare you!” cried Mrs. Vivianson. But Freddy did not seem to hear her—he was rapt in the contemplation of the new masterpiece; and as he rose and gracefully placed it on his partner’s head, Miss Cornelia Vanderdecken was ushered in. She was superbly beautiful in the ivory-skinned, jetty-locked, slender American style, and she wore a hat that Freddy had made the day before, which set off her charms to admiration.

She occupied the sitter’s chair as Mrs. Vivianson glided from the room, and Freddy’s blue eyes dwelt upon her worshipingly. To do him justice, he had lost his heart before he learned that Cornelia was an heiress. Now words escaped him that brought a faint pink stain to her ivory cheek.

“Ah!” he cried impulsively, “you are ruining my business.”

“Oh, why, Monsieur Freddy? Please tell me!” asked Miss Vanderdecken, with naïve curiosity.

“Because,” said Freddy, while a bright blush showed beyond the limits of his black satin mask, “you are so beautiful that it is torture to make hats for other women—since I have seen you.”

There was a pause. Then Miss Cornelia’s silk foundations rustled as she turned resolutely toward the divan.

"I can't return the compliment," she said, "by telling you that it is torture to me to wear hats made by any other man since I have seen you, for other men don't make hats, and I can't really see you through that thing you wear over your face. But——"

Her voice faltered, and Freddy, with a gesture, dismissed his lady assistants. Then he removed his mask. Their eyes met, and Cornelia uttered a faint exclamation.

"Oh my! You're just like him!"

"Who is he?" asked Freddy.

"I can't quite say, because I don't know," returned Cornelia; "but all girls have their ideals, from the time they wear Swiss pinafores to the time they wear forty-eight inch corsets; and I won't deny"—her voice trembled—"but what you fill the bill. My! What *are* you doing?"

For Freddy had grasped his materials and was making a hat. It was of palest blush tulle, with a crown of pink roses, and an aigrette of flamingo plumes was fastened with a Cupid's bow in pink topaz.

"Love's first confession," the young man murmured as he bit off the last thread, "should be whispered beneath a hat like this." And he gracefully placed it on Cornelia's raven hair.

Mrs. Vivianson, her ear to the keyhole of a side door, quivered from head to foot with rage and jealousy. Time was when he, a penniless, high-bred boy, had implored her to marry him. Now—her blood boiled at the remembrance of the half hint, the veiled suggestion she had made, that they should unite in a more intimate partnership than that already consolidated. With her jealousy was mingled despair. As long as Freddy and his hats remained the fashion, the shop would pay, and pay royally. There had as yet occurred no abatement in the onflow of aristocratic patronage. To avow his

identity—never really doubted—to become an engaged man, meant ruin to the business. The blood hummed in her head. She clung to the door-handle and entered, as Freddy, with real grace and eloquence, pleaded his suit.

“And you are really a Marquis’s second son, though you make hats for money?” she heard Cornelia say. “I always guessed you had real old English blood in you, from the tone of your voice and the shape of your finger-nails, even when you wore a mask. And it seemed as though I couldn’t do anything but buy hats. I surmised it was vanity at the time, but now I guess it was—love!”

“My dearest!” said Freddy, bending his blonde head over her jeweled hands. “My Cornelia! I will make you a hat every day when you are married. Ah! I have it! You shall wear one of mine to go away in upon the day we are wed, the inspiration of a bridegroom, thought out and achieved between the church door and the chancel. What an idea for a lover! What an advertisement for the shop!” His blue eyes beamed at the thought.

But Cornelia’s face fell.

“I don’t know how to say it, dear, but we shall never be married. Poppa is perfectly rocky on one point, and that is that the man I hitch up with shall never have dabbled as much as his little finger in trade. ‘You have dollars enough to buy one of the real high-toned sort,’ he keeps saying, ‘and if blood royal is to be got for money, Silas P. Vanderdecken is the man to get it. So run along and play, little girl, till the right man comes along.’ And I know he’ll say you’re the wrong one!”

Freddy’s complexion, grown transparent from excess of emotion and lack of exercise, paled to an ivory hue. His sedentary life had softened his condition and unstrung his nerves. He adored Cornelia, and had looked forward to a lifetime spent in adorning her beauty with

bonnets of the most becoming shapes and designs. Now that a coarse Transatlantic millionaire with soft shirt-fronts and broad-leaved felt hats might step in and shatter for ever his beautiful dream of union, bitter revulsion seized him. He feared his fate. What was he? The second son of a poor Marquis, with a particularly healthy elder brother. He looked upon the chiffons, the flowers and the feathers that surrounded him, and felt that the hopes of a heart reared upon so frail a basis were insecure indeed. Then his old blood rallied to his heart, and he rose from the divan and clasped the now tearful Cornelia to his breast.

"Go, my dearest," he said, "tell all to your father—plead for me. Do not write or wire—bring me his verdict to-morrow. Meanwhile I will compose two hats. Each shall be a masterpiece—a swan-song of my Art. One is to be worn if"—his voice broke—"if I am to be happy; the other if I am fated to despair. Go now, for I must be alone to carry out my inspiration."

And Cornelia went. Then Freddy, sternly refusing to receive any more customers that day, set himself to the completion of his task. Before very long both hats were actualities. Hat Number One was an Empire shape of dead-leaf beaver, the crown draped with dove-colored silk, a spray of sere oak-leaves and rue in front, a fine scarf of black lace, partly to veil the face of the wearer, thrown back over one side of the brim and caught with a clasp of black pearls set in oxidized silver. It breathed of chastened woe and temperate sadness, and was to be worn if Papa Vanderdecken persisted in refusing to accept Freddy as a suitor.

But Hat Number Two! It was of the palest blue guipure straw, draped with coral silk and Cluny lace. In front was a spray of moss rosebuds and forget-me-nots, dove's wings of burnished hues were set at either side. It was the very hat to be worn by a bringer of

joyful news, the ideal hat under which might be appropriately exchanged the first kiss of plighted passion. Upon it Freddy pinned a fairy-like card, white and gold-edged.

“If I am to be happy, wear this,” was written upon it; and upon a buff card attached to the hat of rejection he inscribed: “Wear this, if I am to be unhappy.” Then he closed the large double bandbox in which he had packed the hats, breathed a kiss into the folds of the silver paper, and, ringing the bell, bade a messenger carry the box to the hotel at which Cornelia Vanderdecken was staying, and where, millionairess though she was, she was still content to dress with the help of a deft maid and the adoration of a devoted companion. Then the exhausted artist fell back on the divan. Cornelia was to come at twelve upon the morrow.

“Then I shall learn my fate,” said Freddy. He drove home in his brougham, and passed a sleepless night. The fateful hour found him again upon his divan, surrounded by the materials of his craft, waiting feverishly for Cornelia.

The curtains parted. He started up at the rustling of her gown and the jingling of her bangles. Horror! she wore the somber hat of sorrow, though under its shadow her face was curiously bright.

She advanced toward Freddy. He reeled and staggered backward, raised his white hand to his delicate throat, and fell fainting amongst his cushions. Cornelia screamed. Mrs. Vivianson and her young ladies came hurrying in. As the stylish widow noted Cornelia’s headgear, her eyes flashed and joy was in her face. Then it clouded over, for she knew that Papa Vanderdecken had been coaxed over, and Freddy was an accepted man. My reader, being exceptionally acute, will realize that the jealous woman had changed the tickets on the hats.

“Not that it was much use,” she avowed to herself, as she entered with smelling-salts and burnt feathers to restore Freddy’s consciousness. “When he revives, she will tell him the truth.” But Freddy only regained consciousness to lose it in the ravings of delirium. He had an attack of brain fever, in which he wandered through groves of bonnet shops, looking unavailingly for Cornelia. And then came the crisis, and he woke up with an ice-bandage on, to find himself in his bedroom at Glanmire House, with the Marchioness leaning over him.

“Mother, my heart is broken,” said the boy—he was really little more. “The world exists no more for me. Let me make my last hat—and leave it.”

“Oh, Freddy, don’t you know me?” gasped Cornelia in the background; but the repentant woman who had brought about all this trouble drew the girl away.

“Even good news broken suddenly to him in his weak state,” said Mrs. Vivianson in a rapid whisper, “may prove fatal. I have a plan which may gradually enlighten him.”

“I trust you,” said Cornelia. “You have saved his life with your nursing. Now give him back to me!”

“Hush!” said Mrs. Vivianson.

She had rapidly dispatched a messenger to Condover Street, and now, as Freddy again opened his eyes and repeated his piteous request, the messenger returned. Then all present gathered about the bed, whose inmate had been raised upon supporting pillows. It was a queer scene as the shaded electric light above the bed played upon Freddy’s pallid features, showing the ravages of sickness there. “Now!” said Mrs. Vivianson. She placed the milliner’s box upon the bed, and Freddy’s feeble fingers, diving into it, drew forth a spray of orange blossoms and a diaphanous cloud of filmy lace.

“Black—not white!” Freddy gasped brokenly. “It

is a mourning toque that I must make. Let Cornelia wear it at my funeral."

"Cornelia will not wear it at your funeral, Freddy," said Mrs. Vivianson, bending over him; "for she is going to marry you, not to bury you." And, drawing the tearful girl to Freddy's side, she flung over her beautiful head the bridal veil, and crowned her with a wreath of orange blossoms. And as, with a feeble cry, Freddy opened his wasted arms and Cornelia fell into them, Mrs. Vivianson, her work of atonement completed, pressed the offered hand of Freddy's mother, and hurried out of the room and out of the story. Which ends, as stories ought, happily for the lovers, who are now honeymooning in the Riviera.

UNDER THE ELECTRICS

A SHOW-LADY IS ELOQUENT

“REALLY, my dear, I think the man has gone a bit too far. Writes a play with a fast young lady in the Profession for the heroine—and where he got his model from I can’t imagine—and then writes to the papers to explain, accounting for her past being a bit off color—*twiggez-vous?*—by saying she isn’t a Chorus-lady, only a Show-lady.

“Gracious! I’m short of a bit of wig-paste, my pet complexion-color No. 2. Any lady present got half a stick to lend? I want to look my special best to-night: *somebody in the stalls*, don’tcherknow! Chuck it over!—mind that bottle of Bass! I’m aware beer is bad for the liver, but such a nourishing tonic, isn’t it? When I get back to the theater, tired after a sixty-mile ride in somebody’s 20 h.p. Gohard—*twiggez?*—a tumbler with a good head to it makes my dear old self again in a twink.

“Half-hour? That new call-boy must be spoke to on the quiet, dears. Such manners, putting his nasty little head right into the show-ladies’ dressing-room when he calls. I suggest, girlyes, that when we’re all running down for the general entrance in the First Act—and that staircase on the prompt side is the narrowest I ever struck—I suggest that when we meet that little brute—he’s always coming up to give the principals the last call—I suggest that each girl bumps his head against

the wall as she goes by! That'll make twenty bumps, and do him lots of good, too!

“Miss de la Regy, dear, I lent you my blue pencil last night. Hand it over, there's a good old sort, when you've given the customary languish to your eyes, love. What are you saying? Stage-Manager's order that we're not to grease-black our eyelashes so much, as some people say it looks fair hideous from the front? Tell him to consume his own smoke next time he's in a beast of a cooker. Why don't he tell *her* to mind her own business?—I'm sure she's old enough! What I say is, I've always been accustomed to put lots on mine, and I don't see myself altering my usual make-up at this time o' day. Do you? Not much?—I rather thought so. What else does he say?—he'll be obliged if we'll wear the chin-strap of our Hussar busbies down instead of tucked up inside 'em? What I say is—and I'm sure you'll agree with me, girls—that it's bad enough to have to wear a fur hat with a red bag hangin' over the top, without marking a young lady's face in an unbecoming way with a chin-strap. Also he insists—what price him?—he *insists* on our leavin' our Bridgehands down in the dressing-room, and not coming on the stage with 'em stuck in the fronts of our tunics, in defiance of the Army Regulations? Rot the Regulations, and bother the Stage-Manager! How *she* must have been nagging at him, mustn't she?—because he *can* be quite too frightfully nice and gentlemanly when he likes. I will speak up for him that much. Not that I ever was a special favorite—I keep myself to myself too much. Different to some people not so far off. *Twiggez?* I've my pride, that's what I say, if I am a Show-girl!

“Thirty-five shillings a week, with *matinées*—you can't say it's much to look like a lady on, can you now? No, but what a girl with taste and clever fingers, and a knack of getting what she wants at a remnant sale—

and the things those forward creatures in black cashmere *Princess* robes try to shove down a lady-customer's throat are generally the things she could buy elsewhere new for less money—not but that a girl with her head screwed on the right way can turn out in first-class style for less than some people would think, and get credit in *some quarters we know of*—this is a beastly, spiteful world, my dear—for taking presents right and left.

“Now, who has been and hung my wig on the electric light? If the person considers that a practical joke, it shows—that's what I say!—it shows that she's descended from the lowest circles. I won't pretend I don't suspect who has been up to her little games again, and, though I should, *as a lady*, be sorry to behave otherwise, I must caution her, unless she wishes to find her military boots full of prepared chalk one o' these nights, to quit and chuck 'em.

“Quarter of an hour! That *was* clever of you, Miss Enderville dear, to shut that imp's head in the door before he could pop it back again. Well, there! if you haven't got another diamond ring! . . . Left at the stage-door office, addressed to you, by a perfect stranger, who hasn't even enclosed a line. . . . Perhaps you'll meet him in a better land, dear; he seems a lot too shy for this one. Not that I admire the three-speeds-forward sort of fellow, but there is such a thing as being too backward in coming up to the scratch—twig?

“I ought to know something about that, considering which my life was spoiled—never you mind how long ago, because dates are a rotten nuisance—by one of those hang-backers who want the young woman—the young lady, I should say—to make all the pace for both sides. It was during the three-hundred night run of—There! I've forgotten the name of the gay old show, but Miss de la Regy was in it with me—one of the Tall Eleven, weren't you, Miss de la Regy dear? And we

were Anchovian Brigands in the First Act—Sardinian Brigands, did you say? I knew it had something to do with the beginning of a dinner at the Savoy—and Marie Antoinette gentlemen in powdered wigs and long, gold-headed canes in the Second, and in the Final Tableau British tars in pink silk fleshings, pale blue socks, and black pumps, and Union Jacks. I remember how I fancied myself in that costume, and how frightfully it fetched *him*.

“Me keeping my eyes very much to myself in those days, new to the Profession as I was, I didn’t tumble to the fact of having made a regular conquest till a girl older than me twigged and gave me a hint—then I saw him sitting in the stalls, dear, if you’ll believe me!—dash it! I’ve dropped my powder-puff in the water-jug!—with his mouth wide open—not a becoming thing, but a sign of true feeling.

“He was fair and pale and slim, with large blue eyes, and lovely linen, and a diamond stud in the shirt-front, and a gardenia in the button-hole was good form then, and the white waistcoats were twill. To-day his waistcoat would be heliotrope watered silk, and his shirt-front embroidered cambric, and if he showed more than an inch of platinum watch-chain, he’d be outcast for ever from his kind. Bless you! men think as much of being in the fashion as we do, take my word for it, dear.

“He kept his mouth open, as I’ve said, all through the evening, only putting the knob of his stick into it sometimes—silver knobs were all the go then—and never took his eyes off me. ‘You’ve made a victim, Daisy,’ says one of the girls as we did a step off to the chorus, two by two, ‘and don’t you forget to make hay while the sun shines!’ I thanked her to keep her advice to herself, and moved proudly away, but my heart was doing ragtime under my corsets, and no mistake about

it. When we ran downstairs after the General Entrance and the Final Tableau, I took off as much make-up as I thought necessary, and dressed in a hurry, wishing I'd come to business in a more stylish get-up. And as I came out between the swing-leaves of the stage-door, I saw *him* outside in an overcoat with a sable collar, a crush hat, and a white muffler. Dark as the light was, he knew me, and I recognized him, his mouth being ajar, same as during the show, and his eyes being fixed in the same intense gaze, which I don't blush to own gave me a sensation like what you have when the shampooing young woman at the Turkish Baths stands you up in the corner of a room lined with hot tiles and fires cold water at you from the other end of it out of a rubber hose.

“ ‘Well, have you found his name out yet, Daisy, old girl?’ was the question in the dressing-room next night. I felt red-hot with good old-crusted shame, when I found out that it was generally known he'd followed me down Wellington Street to my 'bus—not a Vanguard, but a gee-gee-er in those days—and stood on the splashy curb to see me get in, without offering an utterance—which I dare say if he had I should have shrieked for a policeman, me being young and shy. No, I'd no idea what his name was, nor nothing more than that he looked the complete swell, and was evidently a regular goner—*twiggez?*—on the personal charms of yours truly.

“If you'll believe me, there wasn't a line or a rosebud waiting for me at the stage-door next night, though he sat in the same stall and stared in the same marked way all through the evening. Perhaps he might for ever have remained anonymous, but that the girl who dressed on my left hand—quite a rattlingly good sort, but with a passion for eating pickled gherkins out of the bottle with a fork during all the stage waits and intervals such as I've never seen equaled—that girl happened to know

the man—middle-aged toff, with his head through his hair and a pane in his eye—who was in the stall next my conquest the night before. She applied the pump—*twiggez?*—and learned the name and title of one I shall always remember, even though things never came to nothing definite betwixt us—twig?

“He was a Viscount—sable and not musquash—the genuine article, not dyed or made up of inferior skins; blow on the hairs and hold it to the light, you will not see the fatally regular line that bears testimony to deception. Lord Polkstone, eldest son of the Earl of—Well, there, if I haven’t been and forgotten his dadda’s title! Rolling in money, and an only boy. It was less usual then than now for a peer to pick a life-partner among the Show-girls, but just to keep us bright and chirpy, the thing was occasionally done—twig? And there Lord Polkstone sat night after night, *matinée* after *matinée*, in the same place in the stalls, with his mouth open and his large blue eyes nailed upon the features of yours truly. Whenever I came out after the show, there he was waiting, but it went no farther. Pitying his bashfulness, I might—I don’t say I would, but I *might*—have passed a ladylike remark upon the weather, and broken the ice that way. But every girl in my room—the Tall Eleven dressed in one together—every girl’s unanimous advice was, ‘Let him speak first, Daisy.’ Then they’d simply split with laughing and have to wipe their eyes. Me, being young and unsophis—I forget how to spell the rest of that word, but it means jolly fresh and green—never suspected them of pulling my leg. I took their crocodileish advice, and waited for Lord Polkstone to speak. My dear, I’ve wondered since how it was I never suspected the truth! Weeks went by, and the affair had got no farther. Young and inexperienced as I was, I could see by his eye that his was no Sunday-to-Monday affection, but a real, lasting devotion of the

washable kind. Knowing that, helped me to go on waiting, though I was dying to hear his voice. But he never spoke nor wrote, though several other people did, and, my attention being otherwise taken up, I treated those fellows with more than indifference.

“I remember the Commissionaire—an obliging person when not under the influence of whisky—telling me that what he called a rum party had left several bouquets at the stage-door—no name being on them, and without saying who for—which seemed uncommonly queer. Afterward it flashed on me—but there! never mind!

“If I had ever said a word to that dear when his imploring eyes met mine, and lingered on the curb when I heard his faithful footsteps following me to my 'bus, the mask would have fallen, dear, and the blooming mystery been brought to light. But it shows the kind of girl I was in those days, that with 'Good-evening,' ready on the tip of my tongue, I shut my mouth and didn't say it. If I had, I might have been a Countess now, sitting in a turret and sewing tapestry, or walking about a large estate in a tailor-made gown, showing happy cottagers how to do dairy-work.

“That's my romance, dear—is there a drop of Bass left in that bottle? I've a thirst on me I wouldn't sell for four 'd.' Spite and malice on the part of some I shall not condescend to accuse, helplessness on his part—poor, devoted dear!—and ignorance on mine, nipped it in the bud; and when he vanished from the stalls—didn't turn up at the stage-door—appearing in the Royal Box, one night I shall never forget, with two young girls in white and a dowager in a diamond fender, I knew he'd given up the chase, and with it all thoughts of poor little downy Me.

“We were singing a deadly lively chorus about being 'jolly, confoundedly jolly!' and I stood and sang and sniveled with the black running off my eyes. For even to

my limited capacity, and without the sneering whispers of a treacherous snake-in-the-grass, whose waist I had to keep my arm round all the time, me playing boy to her girl, first couple proscenium right, next the Royal Box, where he sat with those three women—I could see how I'd lost the prize. One glance at Lord Polkstone—prattling away on his fingers to the best-looking of those two girls, neither of 'em being over and above what I should call passable—one glance revealed the truth.

“He was deaf and dumb!—and I had been waiting a week of Sundays for him to speak out first. Hugging my happy love and my innocent hope to my heart of hearts—there's an exercise in h's for any person whose weakness lies in the letter—I'd been waiting for what couldn't never come. Why hadn't he have wrote? That question I've often asked myself, and the answer is that none of them who could have told Lord Polkstone my name could understand the deaf and dumb alphabet.

“Oh! it was a piercing shock—a freezing blow I've never got over, dear, nor never shall. He married that girl in white, that artful thing who could understand his finger language and talk back.

“Think what a blessing I lost in a husband who could never contradict or shout at me. And I feel I could have been an honor to the Peerage, and worn a coronet like one born to it. I'll stand another Bass, dear, if you'll tell the dresser to fetch it; or will you have a brandy-and-Polly? You've hit it, dear, the girls were shocking spiteful, but I was jolly well a lot too retiring and shy. I've got over the weakness since, of course, and now I positively make a point of speaking if one of 'em seems quite unusually hangbacky.

“‘Who knows,’ I say to myself, ‘perhaps he's deaf and dumb!’”

“VALCOURT’S GRIN”

THE lovely and high-born relict of a decrepit and enormously wealthy commoner, she had sustained her husband’s loss with a becoming display of sorrow, and passed with exquisite grace and discretion through the successive phases of the toilet indicative of connubial woe. From a lovely chrysalis swathed in crape she had changed to a dove-colored moth; the moth had become a heliotrope butterfly, on the point of changing its wings for a brighter pair, when the post brought her a letter from one of her dearest friends. It bore the Zurich postmark, and ran as follows:

“HOTEL SCHWERT,
“APPENBAD,
“*June 18th.*

“I wonder, dear, whether you would mind being troubled with Val for a day? He is coming up from Seaton next Thursday on dentist’s leave, and one does not care that a boy of sixteen—one can consider Val a boy without stretching the imagination overmuch—should be drifting anchorless in town. You will find him grown and developed. . . . You see, I take it for granted, in my own rude way, that you have already said ‘Yes’ to my request. . . . The views here are divine—such miles of eye-flight over the Lake of Constance and the Rhine Valley! To quote poor Dynham, who suffered much from the whey-cure, ‘every prospect pleases, and only man is bile.’ Kiss Val for me. My dear, the thought of his future is a continual anxi-

ety. The title to keep up, and an income of barely eight thousand pounds. . . . ‘Marry him,’ you will say; but to whom? American heiresses are beginning to have an exorbitant idea of their own value, and then Val’s is an open, simple nature—*unworldly to a degree!* Not that I, his mother, could wish him otherwise, but—you will understand and sympathize, I know! And boys are so easily molded by a woman who has charm! If you could drop a word here and there, calculated to bring him to a sense of the responsibility that rests upon his young shoulders, the *duty* of restoring the diminished fortunes of his house by a *really sensible* marriage. . . . I have dinned and dinned, but I fear without much result.

“Ever yours,

“G. D. E. V. T.

“Please address Val, ‘Care of Rev. H. Buntham, Seaton College, near Grindsor.’—G.

“Buntham is the house-master. V. says he ‘*understands the fellows thoroughly.*’ Such a tribute, I think, to a tutor *from a boy.*—G.”

So a dainty monogrammed and coroneted note, on heliotrope paper, with a thin but decided bordering of black, was sent off to the Marquis of Valcourt, and Valcourt’s hostess in prospective consulted a male relative over the luncheon-table as to the most approved methods of entertaining a schoolboy.

“Heaps of indigestible things to eat—sweet for choice—and a box at the Gaiety if there’s a *matinée*; if not, the Hippodrome. But who’s the boy?” asked the male relative.

“Lord Valcourt, Geraldine’s eldest.”

The male relative pursed up his lips into the shape of a whistle, and helped himself to a cutlet in expressive silence.

"Geraldine is devoted to him. He seems to have a delightful nature, to be quite an ideal son!"

"That young—that young fellow!"

"You have met him, haven't you?"

"I have had that privilege. I was one of the house-party at Traye last September."

"Geraldine asked me, but of course it was out of the question. . . ."

"Of course, poor Mussard's death—quite too recent," murmured the male relative, taking green peas.

Poor Mussard's charming relict drooped her long-lashed, brown eyes pensively, and the transparent lace, that covered the hiding-place of the heart that had been wrung with presumable anguish eighteen months before, billowed under the impulse of a little dutiful sigh.

"What a prize for some lucky beggar with a big title and empty pockets!" reflected the male relative, who happened to be a brother, and could therefore contemplate dispassionately. "Thirty—and looks three-and-twenty *en plein jour*, without a pink-lined sunshade." Aloud he said: "So you are to entertain Valcourt—Tuesday, I think you said?"

"Thursday. It would be dear of you to come and help me," murmured Mrs. Mussard plaintively.

"It would afford me delight to do so," returned the male relative unblushingly, "had I not unfortunately an engagement to see a man about a fishing-tour in Norway."

"Tiresome! I know so little about modern school-boys!" murmured Mrs. Mussard.

"The less you know about 'em, my dear Vivienne, the better."

"Having been a boy yourself," the speaker's sister responded, with gentle acerbity, "you are naturally prejudiced. But, going by Geraldine's account, Valcourt is not the ordinary kind of boy at all. Indeed, I have

promised her to take him in hand, and impart a few *viva voce* lessons in *savoir faire* and worldly wisdom.”

“*Have you?* By Jove, Vivie, you’ve taken something upon yourself! ‘Angels rush in where demons fear to tread. . . .’ I’m mulling the quotation, but in its perfect state it isn’t complimentary. May Valcourt profit by your instructions on Thursday!”

Thursday came, and with it Valcourt. He was pleasing to view; a clean-limbed, broad-shouldered, straight-featured, pink-and-white specimen of the well-bred English youth of sixteen, with fair hair brushed into a silky sweep above a wide, ingenuous brow; sleepy gray-green eyes, with yellow and blue reflections in them, reminding the beholder of tourmaline; well-kept hands, pleasing manners, and a wide, innocent grin of the cherubic-angelic kind, never more in evidence than when Valcourt was engaged in some pursuit neither angelic nor cherubic. Mrs. Mussard, at first sight, was conscious of a brief maternal inclination to kiss him. Geraldine’s boy was, she said to herself, “a perfect duck!” She subdued the osculatory impulse, shook hands with the boy cordially, and hoped the dentist had not hurt him.

“No, thanks awfully,” said Valcourt, with his cherubic grin. The teeth revealed were exceedingly white and regular.

“But you had gas, of course?” proceeded his hostess.

“When I have teeth out I generally do,” said Valcourt carefully. “They always give you half a guinea extra allowance for gas, so most of the fellows ask to have it.” He touched his waistcoat pocket meditatively as he spoke, and smiled, or rather grinned, again so seraphically that Mrs. Mussard longed to tip him a ten-pound note. She gave her young guest a sumptuous luncheon, and, not without serious misgivings, commanded the butler to produce the exhilarating beverage of champagne.

"A little sweet, isn't it?" said Valcourt critically.

"I thought that you—that is——" Mrs. Mussard crumpled her delicate eyebrows in embarrassment, and the butler permitted himself the shadow of a smile.

"Ladies like sweet wine," remarked Valcourt. He refused liqueur with coffee, but considered Mrs. Mussard's cigarettes "rather mild."

"I—I don't usually smoke that brand," his hostess explained. "I—I ordered them on purpose for——" She broke off, in sheer admiration of Valcourt's beautiful grin.

The *matinée* for which she had secured a stage-box did not commence until three. "Time for a little chat in the drawing-room," she thought, and ran over in her mind a list of the things dear Geraldine would have wished her to say. She bade the boy sit in the opposite angle of her pet sofa, upholstered in shimmering lily-leaf green, billowed with huge puffy pillows of apricot-yellow, covered with cambric and Valenciennes. She thought the harmony well completed by Valcourt's sleek fair head and inscrutable tourmaline eyes, and wished for the first time that poor dear Mussard had left an heir. Vague as the yearning was, it imparted a misty softness to her brown eyes, and caused the corners of her delicate lips to quiver. She drew a little nearer to Valcourt, and laid her white jeweled hand softly upon the muscular young arm, firm and hard beneath an uncommonly well-cut sleeve.

"My dear Valcourt," she began.

"Your eyes are brown, aren't they?" asked Valcourt.

"I believe they are," murmured Mrs. Mussard. "My dear boy, I trust that——"

Valcourt shut his own sleepy tourmaline eyes and sniffed, a long rapturous sniff. "Mother uses attar of violets. It's her pet scent. Jolly, but not so nice as yours. What is it?" He sniffed again. "I can't guess.

’Mph! I give it up. I know!” The sleepy tourmaline eyes opened, large and round and bright, the cherubic-angelic smile suffused his features. “Why, it comes from your hair!”

“People have said that before. Oh! never mind my hair!” Mrs. Mussard was not displeased, nevertheless. “Tell me how you progress at School. You know your mother is my dearest friend. I should so much like you to remember that and confide in me, *almost* as you confide in her!”

A solemn, innocent expression came over Valcourt’s face.

“All right,” he said, after a pause, during which he seemed to be listening to choirs of angels chanting to the accompaniment of celestial harps. “I’ll tell you things just exactly as I tell ’em to mother!”

“You dear!” exclaimed the impulsive young widow, and kissed him. The smooth elastic skin, brownish-pink as a new-laid egg, and dotted with sunny little freckles, grew pinker under the velvet violence of the lady’s lips. Valcourt turned the other cheek, with his cherub’s smile, and less warmly, because more consciously, his mother’s dearest friend saluted that also.

“Now,” he said, in his boyish voice, “what did you want me to tell you about School? I’m not a sap at books, and I don’t spend all my time in getting up my muscles. I’m just an ordinary kind of fellow. . . . I say, how pretty your nails are!”

He took up one of Mrs. Mussard’s exquisitely manicured hands, and, holding it to the tempered sunlight that stole through the lace blinds, noted with appreciative, if infantile, interest the pearly hues and rosy inward radiances, the nicks and dimples of the wrist and the delicate articulations of the fingers. Then, with a droll, half-mischievous twinkle of the tourmaline eye that was next the fair widow, he bent his sleek, fair head

and rubbed his cheek against the pretty hand caressingly.

"Silly boy!" breathed Mrs. Mussard.

"I believe I am an awful ass sometimes," agreed Valcourt composedly.

"Who says so?"

"My tutor and heaps of other fellows, and the Head—not that he says so, but he looks as if he thought it!" said Valcourt.

"Does the Head see a great deal of you?" asked Mrs. Mussard, drawing away her hand and grasping at a chance of improving the languishing conversation. Then as Valcourt, with a grave air of reserve, nodded in reply, "I am *so glad!*" breathed Mrs. Mussard gushingly; "because, at your age, impressions received must sink in deeply. And to be brought in contact with a personality so marked must be impressive, mustn't it?" she concluded, rather lamely.

"I suppose so," agreed Valcourt, examining the pattern of the carpet. He looked a little sulky and a little bored, and for sheer womanly desire of seeing the illuminations rekindled Mrs. Mussard gave him her hand again.

"You are going into the Guards, aren't you, by-and-by?" she queried.

"If I can get through," said Valcourt, playing with her rings and smiling. "I'm in the Army Class, mathematics and swot generally. But I think our family's too old or something to produce brainy fellows. Cads are cleverer, really, than we are."

His tone took a reflection of the purple, his finely-cut profile looked for an instant hard as diamond and exquisite as a cameo.

Mrs. Mussard, sympathizing, said to herself: "After all, why *should* he be clever?"

"Still, when one hasn't much money," she began, reminiscent of the Duchess's entreaty.

“We’re beastly poor, of course,” admitted Valcourt. “But as to clothes and horses and shootin’, tradespeople will tick a fellow till the cows come home, and the millionaire manufacturers who buy or rent fellows’ forests and moors and rivers and things are always glad to get the fellow himself to show with ’em; and the keepers and gillies and chaps take care that he gets the best that’s going generally. And so he does himself pretty well all round.”

“That sort of thing is too—undignified!” said Mrs. Mussard, “and too uncertain. A man of rank and title must have a solid backing, a definite *entourage*. You must marry, and marry well.”

“Mother always talks like that!” said Valcourt. “I think,” he added, “she has somebody in her eye for me!”

“Who is she?” asked Mrs. Mussard sharply.

“I’m not quite sure,” said Valcourt, his tourmaline eyes narrowing as he smiled his angelic smile. “Dutch Jewess, perhaps,” he added simply, “with barrels of bullion and a family all nose.”

“Horrible!” cried Mrs. Mussard, shuddering.

“Her brother’s in the Fifth,” let out Valcourt. “We call him ‘Hooky Holland.’ Their father was secretary to the Klaproths and made heaps of cash—‘cath’ Hooky calls it. He never talks about anything but ‘cath,’ and fellows punch him for it.” Valcourt doubled his right hand scientifically, thumb well down, and glanced at it with modest appreciation ere he resumed: “He has lots of it, too, Hooky, and lends at interest—pretty thick interest—to fellows who get broke at Bridge or baccarat!”

“Oh-h! You don’t play baccarat at school, surely! Such an awfully gambling game!” expostulated Valcourt’s hostess.

“We go to school to be educated, you see,” said Valcourt, in a slightly argumentative tone, “for what Bun-

tham calls 'the business of life,' and cards are part of a fellow's life, aren't they? So they ought, instead of being forbidden, to form part of what Old Cads calls the curriculum. We call Buntham 'Cads' because he calls us cads when we do anything that upsets him. He's a nervous beggar, and gets a good deal of upsetting. My dame says he weighs himself at the end of every term, and makes a note of the pounds he's lost since the beginning. When I go to Sandhurst she thinks he'll pick up a bit," explained Valcourt with his angelic grin.

"I hope your dame is a nice, motherly old person!" breathed Mrs. Mussard.

"She's nice—quite," said Valcourt, "and awfully obliging. I don't know about being old—unless you'd call thirty-three old." Mrs. Mussard started slightly. "When I have a cold she makes me jellies and things. Awfully good things! And I give her concert tickets, and sometimes we go on the river and have strawberries and cream. Lots of our fellows tell her their love affairs."

"Do you?"

"And some of 'em are in love with her," went on Valcourt.

Mrs. Mussard breathed quickly. Never before had she realized what perils environ the young of the opposite sex, even with the chaste environment of school bounds. In her agitation she laid her hand on Valcourt's shoulder. "I hope—you do not fancy yourself in love with her," she uttered anxiously.

"Not much catch!" said Valcourt, with the composure of forty. "I got over that in my second year."

"Silly boy!" Mrs. Mussard very gently smoothed down a lock at the back of his head, which erected itself in silky defiance above its fellows. "When love comes to you, Valcourt," she went on, with a vivid recollection of the utterances of the inspired authoress of *The Bride's*

Babble Book, “you will find out what it *really* means. It is a great mystery, my dear boy, a sacred and solemn unveiling of the heart——”

She stopped, for Valcourt had turned his face up toward hers, gently smiling, and revealing two neat rows of milky white teeth. His tourmaline eyes had an odd expression.

“Did you speak, dear?” his fair Gamaliel asked. For the impression upon her was that he had uttered two words, and that they were, “Hooky’s sister!”

But Valcourt shook his head. “I was only thinking. A fellow like me . . . has got to take what comes . . . the best he can get . . . and the better it is, so much the better for him, don’t you see? If he don’t like what he gets, he doesn’t go about grousing. He generally pretends he’s suited; and *she* pretends; and they get into a groove—or they get into the newspapers,” said Geraldine’s unworldly babe. “Beastly bad form to get into the newspapers. I never mean to.”

Mrs. Mussard listened breathlessly.

“I shall have a rattling time,” said Valcourt, in his soft, cooing voice, “till Hooky’s sister grows up, and mother presents her, and then I shall marry her, I suppose.”

“Dearest boy, I hope not!” exclaimed Mrs. Mussard. “Someone more suitable *must* be found,” she continued, rapidly putting all the moneyed girls of her acquaintance through a mental review. “Why should you not marry beauty and birth as well as a banking account? The three things are sometimes associated.”

“German princes pick up girls of that kind,” said Valcourt, his elbows upon his knees, and his round young chin cupped in his hands, “and Austrian archdukes. But why need it be a girl?” he went on, pressing up the smooth young skin at his temples with his finger-tips, so as to produce the effect of premature crows’-feet.

"I don't like girls—all red wrists and flat waists. Why shouldn't it be a woman, say a dozen years older—an awfully pretty woman, rich, and in the best set, who'd show me the ropes? I'm a jolly ass in some things. I shall come no end of croppers when I go into society, unless there's somebody to give me the needful tip."

Mrs. Mussard sat very upright. She looked at Valcourt; the hand with which she had smoothed his hair remained suspended in mid-air until she recollected it and laid it over its companion in her lap.

"Most young fellows beginning life go to other men's wives for advice," said Valcourt. "Why shouldn't I go to my own?"

Mrs. Mussard's chiseled scarlet lips moved as though she had echoed, "Why not?"

"They—the chaps I'm talking of—are wild about 'em—the other men's wives. Yet nearly all of the women are old enough to be their mothers."

"Their grandmothers, sometimes," said Mrs. Mussard unkindly.

"Then why shouldn't I marry a woman who's only old enough to be my aunt—a young aunt! I'd make a Marchioness of her, don't you know! and she'd make—she could make anything she liked of me!" said Valcourt, turning his cherub smile and tourmaline eyes suddenly on Mrs. Mussard. "*You could!*" The lovely widow started violently, and flushed from the string of pearls encircling her pretty throat to the little gold hair-waves that crisped at her blue-veined temples. "*You know you could!*" murmured Valcourt. The strong young arm in the well-cut sleeve intercepted the retreating movement that would have placed the lovely widow in the uttermost corner of the sofa. The remonstrance upon Vivienne's lips was stifled by a kiss, given with eloquence and decision, though the lips that administered it were soft, and unshaded by even the rudiments

of a mustache. “I’m seventeen the end of this term, and five feet nine in my socks,” said Valcourt, a little breathlessly, for the kiss had not been one-sided; “and—and you’re simply awfully pretty. Marry me—I shall be of age before you know it—and——”

“You dreadfully presuming boy!” There were tears in the lovely eyes of the late Mr. Mussard’s lovely widow; an unwonted throbbing in the region of her bodice imparted a tremor to her voice that added to its charm. “I shall write to your mother!”

“Do!” said Valcourt, with his angelic smile. “She’ll be awfully pleased! I wonder the idea didn’t occur to her instead of to me, for she’s awfully clever, and I’m rather an ass. . . . Five o’clock!” he exclaimed, as the delicate chime of a Pompadour clock upon the mantelshelf announced the hour.

“And you have missed the *matinée!*” said Mrs. Mussard.

“I preferred this!” said Valcourt, getting up. She had no idea of his being taller than herself until she found the tourmaline eyes looking down into hers. “Good-bye, and thank you, Mrs. Mussard,” said the boyish, ringing voice. “I’ve had an awfully pleasant day.”

Their hands met and lingered.

“Don’t call me Mrs. Mussard any more; my—my name is Vivienne,” she said in a half-whisper.

“Jolly! Hooky’s sister’s is Bethsaba,” said Valcourt. He made a quaint grimace, as though the word tasted nasty, and Vivienne gave a little, musical, contented laugh. “And I may come again, mayn’t I?”

“This week,” nodded Mrs. Mussard.

“I’ll say it’s my tooth,” explained Geraldine’s guileless offspring.

He reached the door, the handle turned, when Mrs. Mussard beckoned, and Valcourt came back.

“I should like to ask you,” she began hesitatingly—

"not that it matters to me; but *still*, in your *own interests*— And you know your mother is my dearest friend!" . . . Valcourt stood with the beautiful grin upon his face, and Mrs. Mussard found the thing more difficult to say than she had imagined. "Where did you—who taught you to make love like—like that?—at your—at your age. . . . I—it is——" Valcourt made no reply in words, but the expression upon his face became more celestial than before. "I hope kissing is not a feature of the curriculum. But, understand clearly," said Mrs. Mussard, with that unusual tremor in her charming voice, "that you are not for the future to kiss anybody but me!" And as the door closed on Valcourt's heavenly grin and tourmaline eyes, she sat down to write a letter to Geraldine.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE FAIREST

IF not absolutely a nincompoop, Gerald Delaurier Gandelish, Esq., of Swellingham Mansions, Piccadilly, Undertherose Cottage, Sunningwater, Berks, and Horshundam Abbey, Miltshire, was undoubtedly a type of the *genus homo* recently classified by a distinguished K.C. as soft-minded gentlemen. Strictly educated by a private clerical tutor under the eye of pious parents of limited worldly experience and unlimited prejudices, it was not to be expected that Gerry, upon their dying and leaving him in undisputed command of a handsome slice of the golden cheese of worldly wealth, should not immediately proceed to make ducks and drakes of it. He essayed to win a name upon the Turf; and when I remind you that, at a huge price, the youth became possessor of that remarkable Derby race-horse, Duffer, by Staggers out of Hansom Cab, from whom eighteen opponents cantered away in the Prince's year of '90, leaving the animal to finish the race at three lengths from the starting-post, I have said all. Gerry dabbled "considerable," as our American relatives would say, in stocks, and started a *café chantant* on the open-air Parisian plan, which was frequented only by stray cats and London blacks, and has since been roofed in and turned into tea-rooms. Sundry other investments of Gerry's resulted in the enrichment of several very shady persons, and a consequent, and very considerable, diminution in the large stock of ready money with which Gerry had started his career. But though the edges of

the slice of golden cheese had been a good deal nibbled, the bulk of it remained, and Gerry's Miltshire acres, strictly entailed and worth eighty thousand pounds, with another twenty thousand in Consols, and about half as much again snugly invested in Home Rails, made him a catch worth angling for in the eyes of many mothers.

We have termed Gerry "soft-minded." He was also soft-hearted, soft-eyed, soft-voiced, soft-haired, soft-skinned, and soft-mannered—the kind of youth women who own to years of discretion like to pet and bully, the kind of man schoolgirls call a "duck." True, his neckties aroused indignation in the breasts of intolerant elderly gentlemen, the patterns of his tweeds afforded exquisite amusement to members of the Household Brigade, and his jewelry could not be gazed at without winking by the unseasoned eye; but, despite these drawbacks, Gerry was a gentleman. Without the stamp of a public school or a select club, without the tone of the best society—for, with the exception of a turfy baronet or so and a couple of sporting peers, Gerry knew nobody who was anybody—Gerry was decidedly a gentleman, whose progress to the dogs was arrested, luckily for the young prodigal, when he fell in love with the famous burlesque actress, Miss Lottie Speranza, of the Levity Theater.

Of theaters and theatrical people Gerry may be said to have known little or nothing until the enchanting Lottie blazed upon his field of vision. Gerry's worthy parents, strict moralists both, had considered the theater as the temple of Satan, and had exacted from their only child a solemn promise that he would never enter one. This promise Gerry had actually kept, contenting himself with the entertainments offered by the music halls, which his father had omitted to stigmatize and his mother knew not of. But at the close of a festive dinner, given by Gerry to a select party of "pals," in a private

room at the Levity Restaurant, when a brief, lethargic slumber obscured the senses of the youthful host, the brilliant idea of conveying him to a box in the theater upstairs occurred to one of his guests, and was forthwith carried out. Emerging from a condition of coma, Gerry found himself staring into a web of crossing and intersecting limelights of varying hues, in which a dazzling human butterfly, entangled, was beating quivering wings. The butterfly had lustrous eyes, encircled with blue rims, a complexion of theatrical red and white, and masses of golden hair. Her twinkling feet beat out a measure to which Gerry's pulses began to dance madly. He sent the goddess an invitation to supper, which was promptly declined. He forwarded a stack of roses, which were not acknowledged, and a muff-chain, turquoise and peridot, which were returned to the address upon his card. He felt hurt but happy at these rebuffs, which proved to him that Miss Speranza was above reproach; and when a bosom friend of his own age hinted that the prudish fair one was playing the big game, and advised him to try her with a motor-car, Gerry promptly converted the bosom friend into a stranger by the simple process of asking him to redeem a few of his I O U's. This got about, and caused Gerry's other friends to turn sharp round corners, or jump into hansoms when they saw Gerry coming. Gerry hardly missed them, though the man who could have afforded an introduction to his charmer would have been welcomed with open arms. He occupied the same box at the Levity nightly now, and made up, in its murkiest corner, a good deal of the nightly rest of which his clamant passion deprived him. But he awakened, as by instinct, whenever Miss Speranza tripped upon the stage; and the large-eyed, vacuous, gorgeously-attired beauties who "went on" with the Chorus—the Lotties, Maries, Daisies, Topsies of the noble houses of Montague, Talbot, De Crespigny, and Dela-

mere,—would languidly nudge each other at the passionately prolonged plaudits of a particular pair of immaculate white gloves, and wonder semi-audibly what the man saw in Speranza, dear, to make such a bloomin' silly fuss about?

Gerry had occupied his watch-tower at the Levity for six weeks or so, and was beginning to deteriorate in appetite and complexion (so powerful are the effects of passion unreturned), when Undertherose Cottage at Sunningwater, a charming Thames-side residence of the bijou kind, with small grounds and a capacious cellar, a boat-house, and a house-boat, a pigeon-cote and a private post-box, became suddenly vacant. The tenant, a lady of many charms and much experience, who had passed over to Gerry with the property, returned to her native Paris to open a bonnet-shop; and Gerry, as he wandered over the dwelling with the sanitary engineer and decorator, who had *carte blanche* to do-up the place, found himself strolling on the tiny lawn (in imagination) by the visioned side of the enchantress who had enthralled him, supping (also in imagination) with the same divine creature in the duodecimo oak dining-room, and smoking a cigarette in her delightful company upon the balcony of the boudoir. Waking from these dreams was a piquant anguish. Gerry indeed possessed the cage, one of the most ideal nests for a honeymooning pair imaginable; but in vain for the airy feminine songster might the infatuated fowler spread nets and set springs.

“If we didn't live in this confoundedly proper twentieth century,” thought disconsolate Gerry, “a chappie might hire a coach and eight, bribe a few bruisers to repress attempts at rescue, snap her up respectfully as she came out at the stage door, and absquatulate—no! abduct's the word. Not that I'd behave like a brute; I'd marry her to-morrow if she'd only give me a chance

to ask her. Marquises do that sort of thing, and their families come round a bit and bless the young people. She must have shown the door to dozens of 'em." He sighed, for where the possessor of a ripe old peerage had failed, how could Gerald Gandelish, Esq., hope to triumph? "And she's so awfully proper and stand-offish, too," he reflected. He wondered how many years it had taken those privileged persons whom the lady permitted to rank as her friends to attain that enviable distinction. "I've never met a man who could, or would, introduce me," he added, pulling his mustache, which from happily turning up at the corners had recently acquired a decided tendency to droop. "Seemed to shy at it, somehow; and so I shall take the initi—what-you-call—myself. She shall know from the start that my intentions are honorable, and, hang it! the name's a good one. . . . There's been a Gandelish of Horshundam ever since Henry the Eighth hanged the abbot and turned out the monks, and put my ancestor Gorbred in to keep the place warm. Gorbred was His Majesty's principal purveyor of sack and sugar, 'and divers dainty cates beside,' as the Chronicle has it, and must have given the Tudor unlimited tick, I gather. Anyhow, if four centuries of landlording don't make a tradesman a gentleman, they ought to; and I can't see——"

Gerry climbed into his "Runhard" thirty horse-power roadster, pulled down the talc mask of his driving cap to preserve his eyes and complexion, and ran back to town. That night, as he quitted his box at the conclusion of the Levity performance (you will remember the phenomenal run of *The Idiot Girl* in 19—!), he turned up his coat collar with the air of a man resolved to do or die, and boldly plunged into the little entry leading to the stage door. The bemedaled military guardian of those rigid portals, who had absorbed several of

Gerry's sovereigns without winking, regarded him with a glazed eye and a stiff upper lip.

"Would you kindly——" began Gerry.

But the stage-doorkeeper paid no heed, busily engaged as he was in delivering letters from a rack on the wall, lettered S, into the hands of a slight little woman in a rather shabby tweed ulster and plain felt hat. Gerry's heart jumped as he recognized his own handwriting upon one of the envelopes. . . . Surely the tiny tin gods had favored him! The little woman in the ulster and the plain felt hat must be lady's maid to the brilliant Speranza. As she thrust the letters into her pockets, nodded familiarly to the commissionaire, and came out of the stage-door office, Gerry, his heart in his mouth and his hat in his hand, stood in her way.

"Miss—Madam——" he began. "If I might ask you——"

"What's that?" shouted the commissionaire. As the little woman stepped quickly backwards, Cerberus emerged, purple and growling, from his den and reared his huge body as a barrier before her. "Annoying the lady, are ye?" he roared, with a fine forgetfulness of Gerry's sovereigns. "Wait till I knock your mouth round to the back of your head, you kid-gloved young blaggyard, you! Wait till——"

"Be quiet, O'Murphy!" said the little woman in a tone and with an accent which raised her to the level of lady's companion in Gerry's estimation. And as the crestfallen O'Murphy retreated into his den, she said, turning a plain little clever face, irradiated by a pair of brilliant eyes, upon the crimson Gerry, "Did you wish to speak to me?"

"I certainly do, if you are any relative—or a member of the household—of Miss Speranza," Gerry stuttered.

There was a flash of eyes and teeth in the plain, insignificant face.

“Oh, yes,” said the little woman, “I live with Miss Speranza.”

Gerry’s tongue grew large, impeding utterance, and his palate dried up. Of all creatures upon earth this little tweed-ulstered woman, in the well-worn felt hat with the fatigued feather, seemed to him the most to be envied.

“You—you’re lucky,” he said lamely, and blushed up to the roots of his hair, and down to the tips of his toes.

“I’ve known her ever since she knew herself,” said the little companion. “We were girls together.” Gerry could have laughed in her middle-aged face, but he only handed her his card. “Oh yes,” she said after she had glanced at it. “I seem to know the name. You have written to her, haven’t you?”

“Sev-several times,” acquiesced Gerry hoarsely. “I have ta-taken the privilege.”

“A great many other young gentlemen have taken it too,” observed Miss Speranza’s companion.

Then, as the swing doors behind her opened to let out a blast of hot air and several grimy stage carpenters, and the swing doors before her parted to let in a blast of cold air as the men shouldered out, “Excuse me,” she said, and shivered, and moved as though to pass. “It is very cold here, and the brougham is waiting.”

“Beggin’ pardon!” said O’Murphy, looking out of his hole, “the groom sent his jooty, an’ the pole av a ’bus had gone clane through the back panel av the broom in a block off the Sthrand. . . . The horse kicked wan av his four shoes off, an’ they’ve gone back wid themselves to the stables to get the landau an’ pair——”

“Call a hansom,” said the plain little woman. “I—we can’t wait here all night!”

As O’Murphy saluted and went outside, she stepped into his vacant hutch, and Gerry daringly followed.

“If I might venture to offer,” he began. “My cab—place disposal—Miss Speranza—too much honored——” He trailed off into a morass of polite intentions, rudimentarily expressed. The little companion maintained a preoccupied air; she was probably expecting her mistress, Gerry thought, but the conviction was no sooner formed than banished.

“You are very kind,” she said, “but Miss Speranza cannot avail herself of your offer. She sometimes leaves quite early, and by the private door, and, as it happens, I am going home alone.”

“Oh!” cried Gerry earnestly, “if you knew how awfully I want to speak to you, you would let me drive you there—wherever it is!”

Tears stood in the soft eyes of the somewhat soft-headed young man, and the heart of the little lady in the ulster was softened, for she looked upon him with a smile, saying:

“Here comes O’Murphy to say my hansom is waiting. . . . You may drive with me part of the way, and say what you have to say, if it is so very important,” she said, with a brilliant gleam of mockery in her remarkable eyes.

Need one say that the enamored Gerry jumped at the proposal, and they went out into the plashy night together.

“Give the driver the address, O’Murphy,” ordered the little ulstered woman. “Jump in!” she said to Gerry, and, presto! they were rattling together up a stony thoroughfare leading from the roaring midnight Strand, which in the present year of grace presents a smooth face of macadam.

“Will you have the glass down?” said Gerry.

“Too warm!” cried the little ulstered woman. “Now, what have you to say?”

“How this trap rattles!” shouted Gerry. “One can

hardly hear oneself speak. But with regard to Miss Speranza——”

“I suppose the pith of the matter is—you are in love with her?” shrieked the little woman.

“Madly!” bellowed Gerry. “Been so for weeks. Hold up, you brute!” This to the cab-horse, a dilapidated equine wreck, which had stumbled.

“Oh, you boys! You’re all alike!” cried his companion.

“Mine is a man’s love,” roared Gerry. “I would lay the world at her feet, if I had it; and I want you to tell her so.” The rattling of the crazy cab nearly drowned his accents. “Oh! what do you think she will say?” he bellowed, his lips close to the little woman’s ear.

“She would say—Oh! *do* you think this man is sober?” screamed the little woman. “I mean the driver,” she added, meeting Gerry’s indignant glare.

“I don’t think he is too drunk to drive,” yelled Gerry. “Tell me, if you have a heart,” he howled, “have I any chance *with her?*”

“Ah! we’re off the cobblestones now!” said his companion, leaning back with an air of relief.

“And you can answer my question,” pressed Gerry. “I—I needn’t explain my views are honorable—straight as a fellow’s can be. Love like mine is——”

“So dreadfully greasy!” commented his companion anxiously, as the debilitated steed recovered himself with difficulty at the end of a long slide.

“When I have been sitting, night after night, in that box looking at her, thinking of her, worshiping her, by George!” went on Gerry, “she must have sometimes noticed me, and said to herself——”

“I *knew* he would go down!” cried the little woman, clutching Gerry’s arm, as the steed disappeared and the shaft-ends bumped on the asphalt. “Let’s get out!”

“Don’t be alarmed, lydy,” said a hoarse voice, through the trap overhead, as the panting steed heaved and struggled to regain his hoofs. “’E won’t do it agen this journey. One fall is ’is allowance, an’ ’e never goes beyond.”

“And we’re quite close to Pelgrave Square,” said Gerry.

“How do you know Miss Speranza lives in Pelgrave Square?” said his companion with a keen look.

“Because I’ve seen photogravings of her house in an illustrated interview,” replied Gerry.

“Ah, of course,” said the little lady, with a thoughtful smile. The steed, bearing out his driver’s recommendation, was now jogging along reassuringly enough. “And did the portraits remind you of no one?” she added, with another of those flashing smiles that invested her little fatigued features with transient youth.

“They weren’t half beautiful enough for her,” said Gerry fervently. Then a ray of light broke upon him, and he jumped. “You—you’re a little bit like her!” he exclaimed. “What a blind duffer I am! I’ve been taking you for her companion, and all the while you’re a relative.”

“Yes, I am a relative,” nodded the little lady.

“Her aunt!” hazarded Gerry.

“Her mother!” said the little lady, with a dazzling flash of eyes and teeth. “How stupid you were not to guess it before!”

“I’ve said nothing, madam, that I should not, I trust,” remarked Gerry, with quite a seventeenth-century manner. “And, therefore, when I entreat you to allow me an interview with your daughter, I trust you will not refuse to grant my—my prayer.”

“Hear the boy!” cried the little woman, with a trill of laughter, as the cab pulled up before a large lighted house in a large darkish square. “Well,” she added, “I

think I can promise you that Lottie will see you at least for a minute or two to-morrow. Not here—at the theater, seven o'clock sharp. Lend me a pencil and one of your cards." She scribbled a word or two on the bit of pasteboard, paid the cab in spite of Gerry's protestations, and ran lightly up the solemn doorsteps, turned to the enraptured young man standing, hat in hand, below, waved her hand, plunged a Yale key into the key-hole—and instantly vanished from view.

Behind Gerry's shirt-front throbbed tumultuous delight. To have driven in a cab with *her* mother—talked of *her*, told his tale of love—albeit with interruptions—and won the promise of an interview at seven sharp upon the morrow. . . . Unprecedented fortune! incomparable luck! Did Time itself cease he would not fail to keep the tryst with punctuality. He caught a passing cab, drove home to his Piccadilly chambers, and went to bed so blissfully happy that he spent a wretchedly bad night. The card he kept beneath his pillow; and true to the promise made by the mother of the enchantress of his soul—when, punctually to the stroke of seven, Gerry, dressed with the most excruciating care, and clammy with repressed emotion, presented himself at the stage door of the *Levity*—the scrawled hieroglyphics on the blessed piece of pasteboard admitted him behind the scenes. Led by a smartly-aproned maid, he climbed stairs, he crossed the stage, was jostled by baize-aproned men in paper caps, and begged their pardon. He followed his guide down a short passage, fell up three steps—and knocked with his burning brow against the door—her door! A voice he knew said, "Come in!" and in he went, to find, not the adored, the worshiped Lottie, but the little plainish lady of the previous night, sitting at a lace-veiled dressing-table, attired in a Japanese gown.

"Oh, I say!" murmured Gerry.

"Ah! there you are!" The little lady looked at him over her shoulder, and nodded kindly. "Don't be too disappointed at not finding Lottie here," she said cheerfully; "she won't be long."

"I'm so awfully obliged for all your kindness," said Gerry, sheepishly smiling over a giant bouquet.

"You shall be really grateful to me one of these days, I promise you," said the little lady. "Let my maid take that haysta—that bouquet, and sit down, do!"

Gerry took the indicated chair beside the dressing-table, and noted, as he sucked the top of his stick, how pitilessly the relentless radiance of the electric light accentuated the worn lines of the little lady's face and the gray streaks in her still soft and pretty brown hair.

"Cheer up!" she said, turning one of her flashing smiles upon him as he sadly sucked his stick. "You won't have long to wait for Lottie!"

"No!" said Gerry rather vacuously.

"No!" said Lottie's mother, pulling off some very handsome rings and hanging them upon the horns of a coral lobster that adorned the dressing-table. "She takes about twenty minutes to make up." Her pretty, white, carefully-manicured fingers busied themselves, as she talked, with various little pots and bottles and rolls of a mysterious substance of a pinky hue, not unlike the peppermint suck-stick of Gerry's youth. "And are you as much in love with her to-day," she continued, "as you were last night?"

"So much in love," said Gerry, uncorking himself, "that to call her my wife I would sacrifice everything."

"To *call* her your wife?" The little lady pushed her hair back from her face, twisted it tightly up behind, and pinned it flat with a relentless hairpin.

"To make her my wife," Gerry amended, with a healthy blush.

"Ah!" said the little lady, who had covered her

entire countenance, ears, and neck with a shiny mask of pinkish paste. "A word makes such a difference." She dipped a hare's-foot into a saucer of rouge, and with this compound impartially, as it seemed to Gerry, incarnadined her cheeks and chin. "Of course," she went on, dipping a disemboweled powder-puff into a pot of French chalk and deftly applying it, "you are aware that she possesses in years the advantage of yourself."

"I am twenty-three," said Gerry proudly.

"She owns to more than that!" said the lovely Lottie's mother. She had reddened her mouth, hitherto obliterated by the paste, into an alluring Cupid's bow, and darkened in, above her wonderfully brilliant eyes, a pair of arch-provoking eyebrows. Now, as some inkling of the fateful revelation in store clamped Gerry's jaws upon his stick and twined his legs in a death-grip about the supports of his chair, she rapidly, with a blue pencil, imparted to those brilliant eyes the Oriental languor, the divinely alluring, almond-lidded droop that distinguished Lottie's, seized a tooth-brush, dipped it into a bottle, apparently of liquid soot, rapidly blackened her eyelashes, indicated with rose-pink a dimple on her chin, groped for a moment in a cardboard box that stood upon the ledge of her toilet table, produced a golden wig of streaming tresses, dexterously assumed it, pulled here, patted there, twisted a brow-tendril into shape—and turning, shed upon the paralyzed Gerry the smile that had enchained his heart.

"I told you Lottie would not be long," said Lottie, "and I've made up under twenty minutes. You dear, silly, honorable, romantic boy, don't stare in that awful way. Twenty-three indeed! And I told you I owned to more! I ought to, for I have a son at Harrow, and a daughter of seventeen besides. . . . Do try and shut your mouth. Why, you poor dear goose, I was making

my bow to the boys in the gallery when you were playing with a Noah's Ark. Shake hands, and go round in front and see me do my piece, as usual. I've got used to that nice fresh face of yours up in Box B, and applause is the breath of my nostrils, if I am old enough to be your mother. Leave your flowers; my girl at home has got quite to look out for them—and be off with you, because this"—she indicated the French chalk—"has got to go farther!" She gave Gerry her pretty hand and one of the brilliant smiles, as he blundered up from his chair, gasping apologies.

"Come and lunch with us to-morrow. You know my address, and I've told the Professor all about you. You'll like the Professor—my husband. One of the best, though his wife says it. And the children——"

"Can I come in, mother?" said a clear voice outside.

"All right, pet!" called back Gerry's late goddess, and a girl of seventeen came into the room. She was all that Gerry had dreamed. . . . His frozen blood began to thaw, and his tongue found words. Here was the ideal.

"But her name isn't Lottie!" said his dethroned goddess, with a twinkle of the wondrous eyes. "However, you're coming to lunch to-morrow, aren't you?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Gerry. And as he went round to his box he carefully obliterated the name from the portrait cherished in his bosom for so many weeks, with the intention of filling it in with another to-morrow.

THE REVOLT OF RUSTLETON

A NEW-COMER joined the circle of attentive listeners gathered round the easiest of all the easy-chairs in the smoking-room of the Younger Sons' Club. The surrounded chair contained Hambridge Ost, a small, drab, livery man, with long hair and drooping eyelids, who, as cousin to Lord Pomphrey, enjoyed the immense but fleeting popularity of the moment. Everyone panted to hear the details of the latest Society elopement before the newspapers should disseminate them abroad. And Hambridge was not unwilling to oblige.

"The first inkling of the general trend of affairs, dear fellow," said Hambridge, joining his long, pale finger-tips before him, and smiling at the new-comer across the barrier thus formed, "was conveyed to me by an agitated ring at the telephone in my rooms. Bucknell, my man, hello'ed. To Bucknell's astonishment the ring-up came from 000, Werkeley Square, the town mansion of my cousin, Lord Pomphrey, which he knew to be in holland covers and the care of an ex-house-keeper. And Lady Pomphrey was the ringer. When I hello'ed her, saying, 'Are you there, Annabella? So glad, but how unexpected; thought you were all enjoying your *otium cum* down at Cluckham-Pomphrey'—my cousin's country-seat in Slowshire, dear fellow—such a verbal flood of disjointed sentences came hustling over the wire, so to speak, that I felt convinced, even in the act of rubbing my ear, which tickled confoundedly, that something was quite absolutely wrong somewhere. Pomphrey—dear fellow!—was my first thought;

then the Dowager—the ideal of a fine old Tory noblewoman of ninety-eight, who may drop, so to put it, any moment, dear creature, relieving her family of the charge of paying her income and leaving the Dower House vacant for Lord Rustleton, my cousin's heir and his—ahem!—bride. Knowing that Rustleton was to lead the Hon. Celine Twissing to the altar of St. George's, Hanover Square, early in the Winter season, it occurred to me, so to put it, that the demise of the Dowager could not have occurred at a more auspicious moment. Thank you, dear fellow, I *will* smoke one of your particular Partagas, since you're so good."

Four men struck vestas simultaneously as Hambridge relieved the nicotian delicacy of its gold-and-scarlet cummerbund. Another man supplied him with an ash-tray. Yet another pushed a footstool under his pampered patent-leathers. Exhaling a thin blue cloud, the Oracle continued:

"Amidst my distracted relative's fragmentary utterances I gleaned the name of Rustleton. Hereditary weak heart—circulation as limited as that of a newspaper which on strictly moral grounds declines to report Divorce Cases—and a disproportionate secretion of bile, so to put it, distinguishes him, dear fellow, from, shall I say, mortals less favored by birth and of lower rank. A vision of a hatchment over the door of 000, Werkeley Square—of the entire population of the county assisting at his obsequies, dear fellow—volted through my brain. I seized my hat, and rushed from my chambers in Ryder Street. An electric hansom had fortunately pulled up in front of 'em. I jumped in. 'Where to?' asked the chauffeur. 'To a broken-hearted mother,' said I, '000, Werkeley Square, and drive like the dooce!' "

Hambridge cleared his throat with some pomp, and crossed his little legs comfortably. Then he went on:

“Like the Belgian sportsman, who, in missin’ a sittin’ hare, shot his father-in-law in the stomach, mine was an effort not altogether wasted. All the blinds of the house were down, and the hysterical shrieks of Lady Pomphrey echoin’ through practically a desert of rolled-up carpets and swathed furniture, had collected a small but representative crowd about the area-railings. I leaped out of the motor-cab, threw the chauffeur the legal fare, and bein’ admitted to the house by an hysterical caretaker, ascended to my cousin’s boudoir, the sobs and shrieks of the distracted mother growing louder as I went. Dear fellows, when Lady Pomphrey saw me, heard me saying, ‘Annabella, I must entreat you as a near relative to calm yourself sufficiently to tell me the worst without delay, or to direct me to the nearest person who can supply authentic information,’ the floodgates of her sorrow were opened to such an extent that—possessing a constitution naturally susceptible to damp—I have had a deuce of a cold ever since.

“Lord Rustleton—always a nervous faddist, though the dearest of fellows—Rustleton had suddenly broken off his engagement to the Hon. Celine Twissing, only child and heiress of Lord Twissing of Hopsacks, the colossal financier figurehead, as I call him, of the Brewing Trade. Naturally, the young man’s mother was crushed by the blow. The marriage was to have been solemnized at the opening of the Winter Season—the trousseau was nearly ready, and the cake—a mammoth pile of elaborate indigestion—was bein’ built up in tiers at Guzards’. The presents (includin’ a diamond and sapphire bangle from a Royal source) had come in in shoals. Nothing could be more confoundedly inopportune than Rustleton’s decision. For all her muscularity—and she is an unpleasantly muscular young woman—you’d marry her yourself to-morrow did you get the chance, dear fellow. *Vous n’êtes pas dégoûté.*

“But Rustleton’s a difficult man—always was. His personal appearance ain’t prepossessin’, but he is Somebody, and looks it; d’ye foller me? You feel at once that a long line of ancestors, more or less distinguished, must have handed down the bilious tendency from father to son. Originally—which goes to prove that first impressions are the stronger—Lady Pomphrey tells me he could not stand Celine Twissing, wouldn’t have her for nuts, or at any price; but after the disaster to the steam yacht *Fifi*—run down by a collier at her moorings in Southampton Water, you recollect, when by pure force of muscle Miss Twissing snatched Lord Rustleton from a watery grave, so to put it—he seemed to cave in, as it were, and the engagement was formally announced. I thought his eye unsteady and his laugh hollow, when, with the rest of the family, I proffered my insignificant congratulations. On that occasion, dear fellow, he gave me two fingers instead of one, which amounts to a grip with him, and whispered to the effect that there was no use in cryin’ over spilled milk—a familiar saw which has sprung to my own lips at the most inopportune moments.

“Celine was undoubtedly in love. Her being in love, so to put it, added immensely to Rustleton’s discomfort. For the New Girl is, as well as a muscular being, a strenuous creature, omnivorous in her appetite for mental exercise, and from the latest theories in physics to the morality of the newest Slavonic novelist Rustleton was expected to range with her hour by hour. Her mass of knowledge oppressed him, her inexhaustible fund of argument exhausted him, her fiery enthusiasm reduced him to a condition of clammy limpness which was—I may say it openly—painful to witness. A backward Lower boy and an impatient Head Master might have presented such a spectacle. Thank you, I will take a Vermouth, since you are so kind. But the boy, in

getting away for the holidays, had the advantage of Rustleton, poor fellow!"

Hambridge waited till the Vermouth came, and, sipping the tonic fluid, continued:

"These details, I need not say, were not culled from Lady Pomphrey, but extracted from Rustleton, who had rushed up to town and gone to earth at his Club, to the consternation of the few waiters who were not taking holidays at the seaside. Little by little I became master of the facts of the case, which was one of disparity from the outset. From the muscular as from the intellectual point Celine Twissing had always overshadowed her *fiancé*. But Celine's intimate knowledge of the mode of conduct necessary—I quote herself—to sane living and clear thinking positively appalled him. Rustleton began the day with hot Vichy water, dry toast, weak tea, and a tepid immersion. *She*, Miss Twissing, commenced with Indian clubs, a three-quarter-mile sprint in sweaters, coffee, eggs, cold game-pie, ham, jam, muffins, and marmalade. Did she challenge the man, to whom she was soon to pledge lifelong obedience at the altar, to a single at lawn-tennis, she quite innocently served him twisters that he could only follow with his eye, and volleyed balls that infallibly hit it. At croquet she was a scientist, winning the game by the time Lord Rustleton had got through three hoops, and coming back to stand by his side and goad him to silent frenzy by criticism of his method. She is a red-hot motorist, and insisted upon taking Rustleton, wrapped in fur coats, and protected by goggles, as passenger in the back seat of her sixty-horse-power 'Gohard' when she competed in the Crooklands Circular Track One Thousand Mile Platinum Cup Race, for private owners only, professional drivers barred; and upon my honor, I believe she would have pulled up the winner and heroine of the hour had not the racing diet of bananas, meat jujubes, and egg-nog

created such a revolt in Rustleton's system, poor fellow, that at the sixth hour of the ordeal he was borne, almost insensible, and bathed in cold perspiration, from the *tonneau* to a neighboring hotel.

"To anxiety, in combination with exploding tires, I attribute the fact of Miss Twissing's finishing as Number Four. Dear fellow, since you are so good as to insist, I *will* put that cushion behind the small of my back. Lumbago, in damp weather, is my particular bane. Thankee!"

Hambridge drew forth a spotlessly white handkerchief, flourished it, and trumpeted.

"Now we come to the crux, dear fellows. The Admirable Twissing, as many call her, not content with bein' an acknowledged expert in salmon fishin' and a darin' rider to hounds, set her heart on Rustleton's being practically the same. With a light trout-rod and a tin of worms he *has* occasionally amoosed himself on locally-preserved waters; mounted on an easy-goin' cob, he is, so to put it, fairly at home. Scotch and Norwegian rivers now, shall I say, claimed him as their sacrifice; highly-mettled hunters—the Hopsacks stables are famous—took five-barred gates and quickset hedges with him; occasionally even bolted with him, regardless of his personal predilections. In the same spirit his betrothed bride compelled him to fence with her; instructed him, at severe physical expense to himself, in the rules of jiu-jitsu. The final straw was laid upon the camel's back when she insisted on his putting on the gloves with her, and standing up for half an hour every morning to be scientifically pummeled."

The listeners' mouths screwed themselves into the shape of long-expressive whistles. Glances of profound meaning were exchanged. One man said, with a gulp of sympathy, "*Poor* beggar!"

"And so the worm turned," said Hambridge Ost,

running his forefinger round inside the edge of his collar. "Smarting from upper-cuts administered by the woman who was destined ere long to become the wife of his bosom, flushed from having his head in Chancery, gravely embarrassed by body-blows, dazzled by stars and stripes seen as the result of merciless punches received upon the nose, Rustleton summoned all his courage to the effort, and declined to take any more lessons. Miss Twissing, to do her justice, was thunderstruck.

" 'Oh!' she said, her lips quivering—like a hurt child's, according to Rustleton—'and you were coming on so *capitally*—we were getting on so well. You are really gaining a knowledge of good boxing principles, you were actually benefiting by our light little friendly spars.' Rustleton felt his nose, which was painfully swollen. 'Of course, you could never, never become a first-rater. Your poor little muscles are too rigid. You haven't the strength to hit a print of your knuckles into a pound of butter, but you might come to show form enough to funk a big duffer, supposing he went for you under the impression that you were as soft as you look. But, of course, if you mean what you say'—she pulled her gloves off and threw them into a corner of the gymnasium at Hopsacks specially fitted up for her by a noted firm—'there they go. I'll read the Greek Anthologists with you instead, or'—her eyes brightened—'have you ever tried polo?' she asked. 'We have some trained ponies in the stable, and the largest croquet-lawn could be utilized for a ground, and I'll wire to the County Players for clubs and a couple of members to teach us the rules of the game. You'll like that?'

" 'I'm dashed if I shall!' were the actual words that burst, so to put it, from Rustleton. Celine drew herself up and looked him over, from the feet upwards, as though she had never, so he says, seen him before. Five

feet five—his actual height—gave her an advantage of five inches and a bit over. He begged her to be seated, and, standing before her in as dignified an attitude as it is possible to assume in a light suit of gymnasium flannels, with sawdust in your hair and a painfully swollen nose, he broke the ice and demanded his release from their engagement, saying that he felt it incumbent on him to live his own life in his own way, that Celine crushed, humiliated, and oppressed him by the mere vigor of her intellect and the exuberance of her physical personality—with considerably more to the same effect.

“She looked up when Rustleton, almost breathless, reached a full stop. ‘You give me your word of honor that there is no other woman in the case,’ she murmured; ‘I *can* stand your not loving me, I *can’t* your loving somebody else better.’ As Rustleton gave the required denial—scouted the bare idea—a tear ran down her cheek and dropped on her large powerful arms, which were folded upon her bust—really amazing, dear fellow, and one of her strong points. ‘That settles it,’ she uttered. ‘It’s understood, all’s off between us; you are free. And there is a through express to London at 3:25. But I’m afraid I must detain you a moment longer.’ She rang the bell, and told a servant to tell Professor Pudsey she was wanted in the gym. ‘Tell her to come in sparring kit, and be quick about it,’ were her actual words.

“Until the Professor appeared, Miss Twissing chatted quite pleasantly with Rustleton. The Professor was a large, flat-faced woman, of remarkable muscular development, with her hair coiled in a tight knob at the back of her head, her massive form attired in a thin jersey, short serge skirt, long stockings, and light gymnasium shoes. ‘Let me introduce my friend and resident instructress in boxing, fencing, and athletics,’ says Celine,

'and one of the best, so to put it, that ever put a novice through his paces. Celebrated as the wife and trainer of the late Ponto Pudsey, Heavy-weight Champion of England, and holder of the Hyam's Competition Belt three seasons running until beat by Bat Collins at the International Club Grounds in '92. Pudsey dear'—she turned to the Professor—"you know my little way when I've had a set-back. Instead of playing *le diable à quatre* and being disagreeable and cantankerous all round, I simply send for you and say, as I say now, "Put up your hands, and do your best; I warn you I'm going in for a regular slugging match under the rules of the Amateur Boxing Association. Three rounds—the first and second of three minutes' length, the third of four minutes'. This gentleman will act as time-keeper, and pick up whichever of us gets knocked out. He has plenty of time before he catches the express to town—and the lesson will be good for him.'" She and the Professor shook hands, and, with heads erect, mouths firmly closed, eyes fixed, left toes straight, bodies evenly balanced, left arms workin' loosely, rights well across mark, and so forth, started business in the most thorough-goin' way. Such a bout of fisticuffs—accordin' to Rustleton—you couldn't behold outside the American prize-ring."

"By—Jingo!" ejaculated one of the listeners.

"They led off in a perfectly scientific manner at the head, guarded and returned, retreated and advanced, ducked, feinted, countered, and cross-countered," said Hambridge Ost, "until Rustleton grew giddy. Terrific hits were given and taken before he could command himself sufficiently to call 'Time,' the Professor with a black eye, Celine with a cut lip, both of 'em smilin' and self-possessed to an astonishin' degree; went in again at the end of the brief breathin' space, and fairly outdid the previous round. When a smashin' knock-out on

the point of the jaw finally floored the Professor and she failed to come up to time, leavin' Miss Twissing mistress of the gory field, Celine nodded significantly to Rustleton, and said, as she rolled down her sleeves, 'That would have been for *you*, Russie, old boy, if there had been another woman in the case. As there isn't—good-bye, and good luck go with you! I'm going to put dear old Pudsey to bed, and plaster this cut lip of mine.' "

"I like that girl!" declared the man who had said "By Jingo!" "A rattling good sort, I call her. But a punch-bag would have done as well as the Professor, I should have thought." He tugged at his mustache and wrinkled his forehead thoughtfully. "A damaged lip is so fearfully disfiguring. Has it quite healed?"

"I know nothing of Miss Twissing," said Hambridge, settling his necktie, "and desire to know nothing of that very unfeminine young person, who, I feel sure, would have been as good as her word and pounded Rustleton into a human jelly, had she been aware that there actually existed, if I may so put it, an adequate feminine reason for the dear fellow's—shall I say, change of mind?"

"Of course," said the man who had been anxious about Miss Twissing's lip, "the little bounder—beg pardon! Of course, Rustleton was telling a colossal howler. As all the world knows, or will know when the newspapers come out to-morrow, there was another woman in the case."

"Petsie Le Poyntz," put in another voice, "of the West End Theater. Petsie of the lissom—ahem!—limbs, of the patent mechanical smile—mistress of the wink that convulses the gallery, and inventor of the kick that enraptures the stalls. Petsie, who has won her way into what Slump, of the *Morning Gush*, calls the 'peculiar favor of the British playgoer,' by her exquisite and spontaneous rendering of the ballad, 'Buzzy, Buzzy,

Busy Bee,' sung nightly and at two *matinées* per week in *The Charity Girl*. Petsie, once the promised bride of a thriving young greengrocer, now——”

“Now, Viscountess Rustleton,” said Hambridge Ost. “Don’t forget that, dear fellow, pray. I can conceive, even while I condemn my cousin’s ill-considered action in taking to his—shall I say bosom? yesterday morning at the Registrar’s—a young lady of obvious gifts and obscure parentage without letting his family into the secret—that he found her a soothing change from Miss Twissing. No Greek, no athletics, no strenuousness of any kind. An appearance distinctly pleasing, even off the boards, a certain command of repartee of the ‘You’re another’ sort, an agreeable friskiness varied by an inclination to lounge languidly—and there you have Petsie, dear fellow. The weddin’ breakfast took place at the Grill Room of the Savoy Hotel, the extra-sized table, number three, at the east upper end against the glass partition havin’ been specially engaged by the management of the West End Theater. That, not bein’ an invited guest, I ascertained from the waiter who usually looks after me when I lunch there. The *menu* was distinctly a good ‘un. *Hors d’œuvres* . . . a bisque, follered by *turban de turbot*. . . . Birds with bread-cream sauce, chipped potatoes, tomatoes stuffed, and a corn salad. Chocolate *omelette soufflée*—ices in the shape of those corrugated musk melons with pink insides, figs, and nectarines. Of course, a claret figured—Château-Nitouche; but, bein’ a theatrical entertainment, the Boy washed the whole thing down. The name of the liqueur I did not get hold of.”

“*Parfait Amour*, perhaps?” said a feeble voice, with a faint chuckle.

“As I have said, I failed to ascertain,” returned Hambridge Ost, with a dry little cough. “But as Lord Pomphrey, justly indignant with his heir for throwing

over Miss Twissing, with whose hand goes a colossal fortune, has practically reduced his income to a mere"—he elevated his eyebrows and blew a speck of cigar-ash from his coat-sleeve—"that—the stirrup-cup that sped my cousin and his bride upon their wedding journey was certainly not, shall I say, *Aqua d'Oro?*"

There was a faint chorus of applause. Hambridge, repressing all sign of triumph, smoothed his preternaturally sleek head and uncrossed his little legs preparatory to getting out of his chair. The circle of listeners melted away; the man who had said "By Jingo!" straightened his hat carefully, staring at the reflection of a distinctly good-looking face in the mantel-glass.

"If she had known—if that girl Celine Twissing had known—the game that bilious little rotter meant to play, he'd have had his liqueur before his soup, and it would have been punch—not Milk Punch or Turtle Punch, but the real thing, with trimmings." He arranged a very neat mustache with care. "Sorry she got her lip split," he murmured; "hope it's healed all right. . . . Waiter, get me a dozen Sobranie cigarettes. It's a pity, a confounded pity, that the only man who is really able to appreciate that grand girl Celine Twissing happens to be a younger son. But, anyhow, I can have a shot at her, and I will."

A DYSPEPTIC'S TRAGEDY

"HE is a constant visitor," observed Lady Millebrook.

"And a constant friend," said Mrs. Tollebranch. A delicate flush mantled on her otherwise ivory cheek, her great gray eyes, famed for their far-away, saintly expression, shone through a gleaming veil of tears. With the lithe, undulating movement so characteristic of her, she crossed the velvety carpets to the window, and, lifting a corner of her silken blind, peeped out over her window-boxes of jonquils as the hall-door closed, and a well-dressed man with a slight stoop and a worn, dyspeptic countenance went slowly down the doorsteps and got into his cab. As though some subtle magnetic thrill had conveyed to him the knowledge that fair eyes looked on his departure, he glanced up and bowed, for one moment becoming a younger man, as a temporary glow suffused his pallid features. Then the cab drove off, and Mrs. Tollebranch, slipping her hand within the arm of Lady Millebrook, drew her back to her cosy seat within the radius of the fire-glow, and rang for tea.

"I did not have it up while poor Cadminster was here," she explained. "The sight of Sally Lunn is horrible to him, and he is positively forbidden tea."

"They say," said Lady Millebrook, nibbling the Sally Lunn, "that he lives upon gluten biscuits, lean boiled mutton, and white fish, washed down by weak Medoc, mixed with hot water."

"It is true," returned her friend.

"And yet he dines out. I meet him comparatively often at other people's tables," said Lady Millebrook.

“And here—invariably.” Her eyebrows wore the crumple of interrogation.

“The servants have orders to pass him over,” explained Mrs. Tollebranch, sipping her tea. “If Jerks or Wilbraham were to offer him a made dish, one, if not both of them, would be instantly dismissed.”

“My dear Clarice! Friendship is friendship. . . . But Jerks and Wilbraham. . . . Such invaluable servants! You cannot mean what you say!”

“I do mean it,” nodded Mrs. Tollebranch. “Oh, Bettine!” she murmured, clasping Lady Millebrook’s hand, “don’t look so surprised. If you only knew how much that man has sacrificed for me!”

“If there is anything upon which I pride myself,” observed Lady Millebrook, “it is my absolute lack of curiosity. And yet people are always telling me their secrets—the most intimate, the most important! ‘Bettine,’ they say, ‘you are a Grave!’ . . . So I am; it is quite true. A thing once repeated in my hearing is buried for ever! We have not known each other very long, it is true, but you must have discovered that I am absolutely reliable! Talking of sacrifices, there are so many sorts. Now perhaps in your gratitude for this service rendered you by Lord Cadminster, you overrate. Perhaps it is really not so great as you imagine! Perhaps . . . ! But I am not curious in the least!”

“Would it surprise you to hear,” queried Mrs. Tollebranch, “that Cadminster, two years ago, was *perfectly healthy!* Not the cadaverous dyspeptic he is now; not the semi-invalid, but a robust, healthy, fresh-colored man of the out-of-doors, hardy English type?”

Lady Millebrook elevated her eyebrows. “Dear me,” she observed. “How very odd! And now—you know his horrid *soubriquet*—‘The Boiled Owl.’ He has earned it *since*, of course.”

“He had a splendid appetite once,” continued Mrs.

Tollebranche, "an iron constitution—a perfect digestion. He gave them all three to save a woman's honor. Oh! Bettine, can you guess who the woman was?"

"I never hazard guesses about my friends," said the inexorable Lady Millebrook. "But I feel, somehow, that she may have been you?"

"I was weak," admitted Mrs. Tollebranch, clasping her friend's hand with agitated jeweled fingers. "But not wicked, Bettine. Promise me to believe that!"

"I never promise," said Bettine, "but no one could look at you and doubt that . . . whatever you might do, would be the outcome of irresistible impulse, *not* the result of deliberate—ahem! My dearest, you interest me indescribably," she cried, "and if I were the *least bit* inclined to curiosity, I am sure I should implore you to go on."

"You shall hear the story of Cadminster's Great Sacrifice, Bettine," said Mrs. Tollebranch, "and when you have heard, you will regard him——"

"As Bayard and all the other heroes of chivalry rolled into one, and dressed by a Bond Street tailor," interrupted Lady Millebrook, with a glow of impatience in her fine dark eyes. "I think you mentioned two years ago?" she added, settling a little stray lock of her friend's silken blonde hair, and sinking back among her cushions.

"Two years ago," murmured Mrs. Tollebranch, "Wilibrand became bitten with the Golf Spider. He is as wild about the game to-day," she added, "as ever."

"There is a proverb, 'Once a golfer, always a golfer,'" put in Lady Millebrook. "I believe that to play the game successfully requires a vast amount of thought and judgment, which insensibly diverts a man's mind from less harmless topics, and that it entails an invigorating and healthy action of the arms and legs, soothing to the nervous system, and improving in its effect upon the

temper. Were I asked by any married woman of my acquaintance whether she should encourage her husband in his devotion to golf, or dissuade him from it, I should advise her to encourage the fad. The game, unlike others, can be played all the year round, in sunshine, rain, or snow."

"Willibrand used to play it in the snow," put in Mrs. Tollebranch, "with red balls. It was when we were spending March at Tobermuir two years ago, that——"

"That Lord Cadminster performed the chivalrous action which resulted for him in the permanent loss of his digestion? Well?"

"Tobermuir is the bleakest spot in North Britain," began Mrs. Tollebranch, returning the teacups to the tray, and touching the electric bell in a manner which conveyed the intimation that she would not be at home to any caller for the next quarter of an hour. "The castle is one of the oldest inhabited residences in Europe, and, I verily believe, the coldest. If you would like to find out for yourself how easily a northern gale can penetrate walls ten feet thick in the thinnest places, come to us in July."

"I shall make a point of it!" said Lady Millebrook, cuddling down into her warm, scented lair of cushions.

"Of course, the male division of the house-party was made up of golfing enthusiasts," went on Mrs. Tollebranch. "Major Wharfling, Sir Roger Balcombe, Cadminster, who was as keen as Willibrand in those days, three Guardsmen, and D'Arsy Pontoise."

"By the way, what has become of Pontoise?" queried Lady Millebrook. "One never meets him now as one used."

"He scarcely ever leaves Paris, I believe," returned Mrs. Tollebranch, rather constrainedly. "Since his reconciliation with the Duc, his great-uncle, and his mar-

riage with Mademoiselle De Carapoix, who I have heard is a very strict Catholic and humpbacked——”

“Besides being a great heiress. . . . Of course, he is kept well within bounds. But what a fascinating creature Pontoise used to be. Bubbling with life, effervescing with spirits. Sadly naughty, too, I fear, for the names of at least half a dozen pretty married women used to be mixed up with his in all sorts of scan . . . My dearest, I beg your pardon!”

“I, at least, was not wicked—only weak!” said Clarice, with icy dignity. “And as to there being five others——”

“My sweet, it was the vaguest hearsay. Nothing certain, except that Pontoise spoke perfect English and was a veritable Apollo! I can imagine the rigors of imprisonment in a Border castle in March to have been ameliorated by the fact of his being a guest under its aged roof. Did he play golf?”

Mrs. Tollebranch rose and took a dainty screen of crimson feathers from the high mantelshelf.

“He tried to learn,” she explained, holding the screen so as to shield her delicate complexion from the glowing heat of the log fire. “But the game baffled him. To play it properly, I believe, the mind must be dead to all other interests——”

“And Pontoise’s mind was unusually alive at that particular moment to things outside the sphere of golf,” mused Lady Millebrook. “Golf is a game for husbands, not for——” Her red lips closed on the unuttered word.

“Don’t say, ‘lovers’!” implored Clarice. “From beginning to end, Bettine, it was nothing but a flirtation. I will own that I was—attracted, almost fascinated. I had never met a human being whose nature was of so many colors . . . whose soul . . .” She broke off.

“I have been informed on good authority,” observed Lady Millebrook, “that whenever Pontoise meant mis-

chief he invariably talked about his soul. But do go on! -

"Of course, you played golf also; and as one of the great advantages connected with the game is that you can choose your own partner, I may presume that Pontoise made acquaintance with it under your auspices, and that when he landed himself in the jaws of some terrific sand-bunker, you were at hand to help him out."

"As his hostess, it was rather incumbent upon me," explained Mrs. Tollebranch, "to make myself of use. Willibrand and Sir Roger Balcombe termed him a duffer; Major Wharfing is nothing but a professional, Cadminster and the Guardsmen were hard drivers all. And as Bluefern had made me a golfing costume which was a perfect dream——"

"You completed the conquest of Pontoise. I quite understand!" said Bettine. "In that frock, armed with a long spoon. I quite grasp it."

"The golf course is very open at Tobermuir," went on Clarice, playing with the feather fan.

"But there are hillocks, and bumps and boulders, and things behind which Pontoise managed to get in a good many references to his soul. I grasp *that* also," observed Lady Millebrook.

"He did mention his soul," admitted Mrs. Tollebranch. "He said that it had always been lonely, thirsting for the sympathy of a sister-spirit until——"

"Until he met you!"

"He did say as much. And he explained how, in sheer desperation of ever meeting the affinity, the flame for whom the spark of his being had been originally kindled, a man may drift into all kinds of follies, even gain the name of a libertine and a *roué*."

"Quite true."

"He has such wonderful eyes, like moss agates, and his profile is like the Hermes of Praxiteles, or would be

but for the waxed mustache and crisp, golden beard. And there is a vibrating *timbre* in his voice that goes to the very heart. One could not but be sorry for him."

"I am sure you were very sorry indeed. But Pontoise, as one knows of him, would not long be content with that. Your heartfelt pity, and the tip of your little finger to kiss. . . ." Lady Millebrook's sleepily dark eyes smiled cynical amusement. "Those things are the *hors d'œuvres* of flirtation. Soup, fish, made-dishes, roast, and sweets invariably succeed, with black coffee and a subsequent indigestion."

Clarice avoided the glance of this feminine philosopher.

"Pontoise was always respectful," she said, with a little note of defiance in her voice. "He never forgot what was due to me save once, when——"

"When it was borne in upon him too strongly what he owed to himself. And then he kissed you, and you were furiously angry."

"Furious!" nodded Clarice, brushing her round chin with the edge of the crimson screen. "I vowed I would never speak to him again."

"And how long did you keep that oath?" asked Bettine.

"We met at dinner in the evening, and of course one has to be civil. And when I went to bed, and he handed me my candlestick," said Mrs. Tollebranch—"for gas is only laid as high as the first floor of the castle, and the electric light has never been heard of—he slipped a note into my hand. It implored my pardon, and declared that unless I would meet him in the golf-house on the links next day before lunch, and receive his profound apologies, he would terminate an existence which my well-deserved scorn had rendered insupportable. He spoke of the—the——" Clarice hesitated.

"The kiss," put in Lady Millebrook, "and——"

"Said he had dared, in a moment of insanity, to desecrate the cheek of the purest woman breathing with lips that ought to be branded for their criminal presumption. He could never atone, he ended, but he could never forget."

"And asked you in the postscript to meet him in the golf-house. I quite understand," observed Lady Millebrook. "Of course, you didn't go?"

Clarice's lovely gray-blue eyes opened. Her sensitive lips quivered.

"Oh! but I am afraid . . ." She heaved a little regretful sigh over her past folly. "That is where I was weak, Bettine. I went. Oh, don't laugh!"

"My child, this is hysteria," explained Lady Millebrook, removing the filmy handkerchief from her lovely eyes. "Well—you went. You popped your head into the lion's mouth—and somehow or other Cadminster played the *deus ex machina*, and got it out for you again."

"The golf-house was a queer shanty, with a tarred roof," said Mrs. Tollebranch retrospectively. "It held a bunker of coals, and stands for clubs, and a fireplace, and a folding luncheon-table, and camp-stools, and hampers. We used to lunch outside when it didn't rain or snow, and inside when it did. Well, when Willibrand and Sir Roger Balcombe, Major Wharfling, the Guardsmen, and Cadminster were quite out of sight, Pontoise and I somehow found ourselves back at the golf-house. I was cold, and there was a fire there, and he looked so handsome and so miserable as he stood bareheaded by the door, waiting for me to enter, that——"

"The fly walked in. And then the spider——"

"He disappointed me, I will own," said Clarice, with a little gulp. "After all his penitent protestations! I have never trusted men with agate-colored eyes since, and I never will. They have only one idea of women,

and that is—the worst. But when I ordered him to let go my hands and get up from his knees, something in my face or voice seemed to tell him that I was really, really, in earnest, and he obeyed me, and moved suddenly away as I went to the door. The latch rattled as I lifted my hand, the door opened; Cadminster stood there, white from head to foot, for a sudden blizzard had swept down from the hills, and the links were four inches deep in snow. Oh! I shall never forget how tactful he was! ‘You have got here before the rest of us!’ he said, quite in a cheery, ordinary way. ‘Lucky for you! Tollebranch and the others are coming after me as hard as they can pelt, and we shall have to put out the “House Full” boards in a minute.’ And he began to rattle out the flaps of the luncheon-table, and get out things from the hamper, and then he looked at me, and said, as he lifted the lid from a great kettle of Irish stew that had been simmering over the fire, ‘Suppose you were to take the ladle and give this mess a bit of a stir, Mrs. Tollebranch! The fire will burn your face, I’m afraid, but what woman wouldn’t sacrifice her complexion in the cause of duty?’ Oh, Bettine, I could have blessed Cadminster as I seized that iron ladle, for seeming so natural and at ease. And then—almost before I had begun to stir the stew—while I was bending over the pot, Willibrand and the other men came in. What followed I can never forget!”

“Now we come to Cadminster’s great act of heroism?” interrogated Lady Millebrook.

“Willibrand came in stamping the snow off,” went on Mrs. Tollebranch. “So did all the other men. Willibrand sniffed the odor of the oniony stew with rapture. All the other men sniffed too.”

“The tastes of the male animal are extraordinarily simple,” observed Lady Millebrook, “in spite of the elaborate pretense carried on and kept up by him, of being

a gourmand and a *connoisseur*. The coarsest dishes are those which appeal most irresistibly to his palate, and when I find it necessary for any length of time to chain Millebrook to his home, I order a succession of barbaric *plats*. By the time we have reached tripe and onions, served as an *entrée*, there is not a more domesticated husband breathing. But pray continue."

"They all assembled round the stewpot," went on Clarice, "and watched with absorbed interest the operation of turning its steaming contents into the dish that awaited them. Cadminster and Willibrand undertook this duty. Well——"

"Well?"

"Just as they heaved up the steaming cauldron, Willibrand called out, 'Hulloa, what the deuce is that?' His hands were occupied—he could not get at his eyeglass," said Mrs. Tollebranch, "and so he peered and exclaimed, while I leaned over his shoulder and glanced into the stewpot. There, floating upon the surface of the muttony, oniony, carrotty, potatoey mass, was"—she shuddered—"the letter Pontoise had given me with my candlestick on the preceding night!"

"My *dear*, how awful!" gasped Lady Millebrook.

"I had had it in my pocket," explained Mrs. Tollebranch, "when I arrived at the golf-house. When I began to stir the stew I found the handle of the ladle too hot to be pleasant, and I pulled out my handkerchief to wrap round it."

"Whisking Pontoise's effusion out with it! How reckless not to have burned it!" cried Lady Millebrook.

"Imagine my feelings!" said Clarice. "There was the letter in the stewpot. As the contents were turned by Cadminster into the dish, I lost sight of the envelope beneath a greasy avalanche of fat mutton and vegetables. I remembered that Pontoise had referred to that unlucky kiss; I recalled Willibrand's unfortunate tendency

to outbursts of jealous rage without reason; I shuddered at the thought of the amount of reason that envelope contained. Self-control abandoned me—my brain spun round, I thought all lost . . . and then—I caught Cadminster's eye. There was encouragement in it—and hope. 'Trust to me,' it said, 'I will save you!'

"And——?"

"We sat down to table, and that stew was distributed, in large portions, to all those men. Cadminster assumed control of the ladle. He gravely asked me whether I cared about stew, and I gasped out something—what I don't know, but I believe I said I didn't. When the words were out, I knew that I had lost my only chance—that Cadminster had intended to help me to that fatal envelope. My fate hung in the balance as he filled plate after plate. . . . Who would get my letter in his gravy, amongst his vegetables? What would happen then? Would it be rendered illegible by grease, or would it not? I scarcely breathed, the suspense was so awful!" said Mrs. Tollebranch, clutching Lady Millebrook's sleeve. "And then—Relief came. I grasped that man's heroic motive—I understood the full nobility of his nature when——"

"When Cadminster helped himself to the letter! But, good heavens! you don't mean to tell me," cried Lady Millebrook, "that he *ate* it?"

"He did, he did!" cried Mrs. Tollebranch, throwing herself into her friend's sympathetic embrace. "Now you know why I call him a Bayard, and look upon him as my truest, noblest friend. Now you know. . . ."

"Why he is a cadaverous dyspeptic! Of course. That document must have completely wrecked his constitution."

"It has," interrupted Clarice, with a little shower of tears.

"I shall never say again," remarked Lady Millebrook,

as she took an affectionate leave of her dearest friend but four, "that Romance and Chivalry have no existence in these modern times. To jump into a den full of lions and things to get a lady's bracelet or save a lady's glove may sound finer, though I am not sure. But to eat another man's love-letter, envelope and all, to save a woman's reputation . . . there is the true ring of heroism about it, the glow that ennobles an ordinary, commonplace action into something superb. And, unless I mistake, Pontoise invariably penned his amatory effusions upon the very stiffest of parchment wove. . . . Darling, Lord Cadminster must dine with us. . . . Next Thursday; I will not take No!" ended Lady Millebrook; "and he may rely upon it that if either Jedbrook or Mills presume to offer him anything rich or oleaginous, either or both of them will be dismissed next day!"

RENOVATION

THE hands of the Dresden clock upon the white travertine mantelshelf of Lady Sidonia's boudoir pointed to the small hours. There was a discreet knock at the door. The maid, a pale, pretty young woman, who was wielding the hair-brush, laid the weapon down, and answered the knock.

"Who is it, Pauline?" asked Pauline's mistress, with her eyes upon the mirror, which certainly framed a picture well worth looking at.

"Her Grace's maid, my lady, asking whether you are too tired for a chat?"

"Say that I shall be delighted, and give me the blue Japanese kimono instead of this pink thing. Will my hair do? Because, if it needs no more brushing, you can go to bed."

"Thank you, my lady."

The door opened; trailing silks swept over the carpet. . . .

"I can't kiss you through all this brown-gold silk," said the Duchess's voice. "Stop, though! You shall have it on the top of your head." And the kiss descended, light as a puff of thistle-down. "I kiss Cull there sometimes, when I want him to be in a good temper. He says it thrills right down to the tips of his toes. . . . You're smiling! I guess you think the stock of thrills ought to be exhausted by this time—three years since we stood up together on the deck of Cluny F. Farradaile's anchored airship, a posse of detectives from Blueberry Street guarding the ends of the fore and aft

cables, where they were anchored three hundred feet below in the grounds of the N'York Æther Club, just to prevent any one of the dozens of Society girls who'd tried their level best to catch Cull and failed, from coming along with a bowie and cutting 'em. . . . You remember the pars. in all the papers, headed, 'A Marriage Made in Heaven,' I guess?"

"Of course, of course," said the Duchess's hostess and dearest friend.

"My invention," said her Grace, "and mighty smart, I reckon. I'd always said I'd be married in a real original way—and I was. The only drawback to the affair was that she pitched—I mean the airship—and the Minister, and Cull, and Poppa, and the inventor—that's Cluny F. Farradaile—were taken poorly before the close of the cer'mony. As for my sex, I'm proud to say that Amurrican women can rise superior even to air-sickness when Paris frocks are in question. But when they wound us down we were glad enough to get back to dry land. We found a representative of the Customs waiting for us, by the way; and if Poppa hadn't gone to law about it, and proved that we were really fixed on to the States by our cables, we'd have had to plank down the duty on every jewel we'd got on. Say, pet, I'm perishing for a smoke!"

The Duchess was supplied with cigarettes. Pauline placed upon a little table the materials that "factorize," as the Duchess would have said, towards the composition of cognac and soda, and glided out.

"Now I call that a real pretty, meek-looking creature," said her Grace, blowing a little flight of smoke rings in the direction of the door. "If she's as clever as she's nice, Siddie, you've got a treasure!"

"She is a good maid," responded Lady Sidonia. "For one thing, she knows a great deal about the toilette, and on the subject of the complexion she's really quite an

authority. She knows something of massage, too—on the American system—for, though an English girl, she has lived in your country——”

“Oh!” said the Duchess, with an accent of interest. “Has she, indeed?”

“She’s reasonable, too,” went on the maid’s mistress; “and not a limpet in the way of sticking to one mode of doing the hair and refusing to learn any other. Then she can *wave*——”

“It is an accomplishment,” said the Duchess thoughtfully. “Now, my woman either frizzes you like a Fiji, or leaves you dank and straight like a mermaid. Why does hair never wave naturally—out of a novel? It’s a question for a Convention. And men—dear idiots!—are such believers in the reality of ripples. There! I’ve been implored over and over again for ‘just that little bit with the wave in it’ to keep in a locket—hundreds and hundreds of times. I guess Cull’s wiser now; but once you’ve seen your husband’s teeth in a tumbler, you’ve entered into a Conjugal Reciprocity Convention: ‘Believe in me—not as much of me as really belongs to me, but as much as you see—and I’ll return the compliment!’ Yes, I guess I’ll take some S. and B. It’s an English accomplishment, and I’ve mastered it thoroughly. We Amurricans rinse out with Apollinaris or ice-water, which isn’t half so comforting, especially in trouble.”

And the Duchess heaved a butterfly’s sigh, which scarcely stirred her filmy laces, and smoothed her prettiest eyebrow with one exquisite finger-tip.

“Trouble!” exclaimed her friend. “My dear, you’re the happiest of women. Don’t try to persuade me that you’ve got a silent sorrow!”

“Not exactly a silent one, because I’m going to confide in you; but still it is a sorrow.” The Duchess confided one hand to her dearest friend’s consoling clasp,

and wiped away a tear with a minute handkerchief that would not have dried half a dozen. "Perhaps Amurrican blood is warmer than English; but, anyhow, our family affections are vurry much more strongly developed over in the States than yours are here. And I had a letter from Momma by yesterday's mail that would have melted a heart of rock." She dried a second tear. "If Momma lives till the end of Creation," she said, "she will never, never get over it. And I don't wonder!"

"Darling, if it would really do you any good to tell me——" breathed Lady Sidonia.

"I tell all my friends," said the Duchess with a sigh; "and they're invariably of one opinion—that Momma was cruelly victimized."

"She is——"

"Call her forty, dear. It would be just cruel to say anything more. People call me lovely and all those things," said the Duchess candidly, "and I allow they're correct. Well, compared with what Momma was at my age, I'm real ordinary."

"Oh!"

"Frozen fact! And you can grasp the idea that when—in spite of every effort—Momma began to lose her figure and her looks, she felt it!"

"Every woman must!"

"But the more she felt it, the more she seemed to expand. . . . Grief runs to fat, I do believe," said the Duchess. "Of course, Poppa's allowance to Momma being liber'l—even for a Corn King—she had unlimited funds at her disposal. To begin with, she rented a medical specialist."

"Who dieted her?"

"My dear, for a woman accustomed to French cookery, and with the national predilection for cookies and candy, it must have been——"

"Torture!"

“One gluten biscuit and the eye of a mutton cutlet for dinner. Think of it! Beef-juice and dry toast for breakfast, ditto for supper. And she used to skip—a woman of that size, too—for hours! And her trainers came every morning at five o’clock, and they’d make her just put on a sweater and take her between them for a sharp trot round Central Park, just as if she’d been a gentleman jockey sworn to ride at so many stone for a Plate. And the number of stone Momma got off——”

“She *got* them off?”

“I guess she got them off,” said the Duchess. “Poppa talked of having an elegant tombstone set up in Central Park to commemorate the greater portion of a wife buried there! then he gave up the notion. And then Momma made handsome presents to her specialist and her trainers, and contracted with the cleverest operator in N’York to make a face.”

“To make a face?” repeated Lady Sidonia.

“To make a face for Momma that matched her youthful figure,” said the Duchess composedly. “My! the time that man took in creating a surface to work on! She slept for a fortnight with her countenance covered with slices of raw veal.”

“Horrible!” shuddered the listener.

“And the massaging and steaming that went on!”

“I can imagine!”

“The foundations being properly laid——” continued the Duchess, lighting another cigarette.

Lady Sidonia went into a little uncontrollable shriek of laughter. “As though . . . she had been a house! . . . Ha, ha, ha!”

“My dear,” returned the Duchess, shaking her beautiful head, “the terms employed in the contract were precisely those I have quoted. . . . The specialist laid the foundations, and carried the contract out. Momma’s appearance delighted everyone, except Poppa, who has

old-fashioned notions, and complained of feeling shy in the presence of a stranger. Fortunately their Silver Wedding eventuated just then, and his conscience—Poppa's conscience is, for a corn speculator's, wonderfully sensitive—ceased to annoy him."

"And your mother?"

"Momma wore her new face for six months with the greatest satisfaction," said the Duchess. "Of course, she had to lay up for repairs pretty often, but the specialist was there to carry them out. Unluckily, he contracted a severe chill in the N'York winter season and died. His wife put his tools and enamels and things in his coffin. She said she knew business would be brisk when he got up again, and she didn't wish any other speculator to chip in before him." The Duchess sighed. "Then came Momma's great trouble."

"There was no other operator to—take up the—the contract?" hinted Lady Sidonia.

"There were dozens," said the Duchess, "and Momma tried them all. My dear, you may surmise what she looked like."

"A heterogeneous mingling of styles."

"It was impossible to conjecture," said the Duchess confidentially, "to what period the original structure belonged. By day Momma resorted to a hat and voile."

"Even in the house?"

"Even in the house. By night—well, I guess you've noticed that a human work of art, illuminated by electric light, isn't seen under the most favorable conditions."

"There is a pitiless accuracy!"

"An unmerciful candor about its revelations. After one unusually brilliant reception, Momma retired from society and took to spiritualism. She persevered until she had materialized that demised face-specialist, and extracted some definite raps in the way of advice."

"And what did he advise?"

"He suggested, through the medium, that Momma should apply to the Milwaukee Mentalists."

"A Society of Faith Healers?"

" 'Occult Operatists,' they call themselves on the prospectuses. As for the cult of the Society," said the Duchess pensively, "one might call it a mayonnaise of Freemasonry, Theosophy, Hypnotism, Humbug, and Hoodoo. But the humbug, like salad oil in the mayonnaise, was the chief ingredient." The Duchess stopped to draw breath.

"And into this vortex Mrs. Van Wacken was drawn?" sighed Lady Sidonia.

"Sucked down and swallowed," said the Duchess, who had been Miss Van Wacken. "They undertook to make Momma right over again, brand new, by prayer and faith and—a mentally electrified bath. For which treatment Momma was to pay ten thousand down."

"Pounds!" shrieked the horrified Lady Sidonia.

"Dollars," corrected the Duchess.

"In advance?" cried the listener.

"In advance, after a demonstration had been given which was practically to satisfy Momma that the Milwaukee Mentalists were square," said the Duchess. "My word! when I remember how they bluffed that poor darling—I should want to laugh, if I didn't cry." She dried another tear.

"Do go on!" entreated her friend.

"The High Priestess of the Community was a woman," went on the Duchess, "just as cool and ca'am and cunning as they make 'em."

"I guessed as much," said Lady Sidonia.

"It takes a woman to know and work on another woman's weak points," rejoined the Duchess. "The High Priestess pretended to be in communication with a spirit. 'The Mystikos,' they called him, and he resided, when he was at home, in a crystal ball; but bullion was

the real totem of the tribe. Well—but it's getting late——”

“I shall not sleep a *wink* until I have heard the *whole story*,” said Lady Sidonia.

“And Cull and your husband are comparing notes about their wives in the smoking-room,” said the Duchess.

“Well, the Theologa——”

“The—the—what?”

“The Theologa—that was the professional title of the High Priestess—whose or'nary name was Mrs. Gideon J. Swale,” her Grace went on, “talked a great deal to Momma, and made some passes over her, and got the poor dear completely under her thumb. Momma wasn't the only victim, you must know. There were four other ladies, all wealthy, and each one, like Momma, the leader of a fashionable society set——”

“And—no longer young?”

“And past their first bloom,” amended the Duchess. “And each of 'em had agreed to plank down the same sum in cold dollars.”

“Fifty thousand in all,” said Lady Sidonia with a sigh. She could have done so much with fifty thousand dollars, even though American money was such beastly stuff. “Worth——”

“Worth riskin' a term in a N'York State prison for—I guess so!” said the Duchess. “Well, Momma and the other ladies signed on to the terms, and went through a cer'mony of purification—which included learnin' a kind of catechism used in admittin' a new member into the Occult Operatists' Community—an' several hymns. That was to make them worthy to receive the Revelation from the Mystikos, I guess. At least, the Theologa——”

“Mrs. Gideon J. Swale?”

“The same. The Theologa said so. In a week or so—

durin' which period they lived at the house of the Community—chiefly on nuts an' spring-water——”

“For which entertainment they paid——” Lady Sidonia hinted.

“Delmonico rates!” said the Duchess. “Well, it was settled that the Demonstration was to come off, with the Mystikos' consent.”

“What sort of——”

“Demonstration? Cur'us,” said the Duchess, “and interesting. There was a woman—a Mrs. Gower, English by birth, Amurrican naturalized—who was to be the Subject. She was a widow—her husband having met his death in an explosion at an oil-gas producin' factory. Stoker to the gas-generator he was, and his wife had brought him his dinner—fried steak in a tin pail—when the hull kitboodle blew up. Husband was killed—wife was saved, though so scarred and disfigured about the face as to be changed from a pretty woman into a plain one.”

“And she—this scarred, disfigured woman—was to be made pretty again by the Occult Operatists?” hazarded Lady Sidonia.

“Guessed it first time,” nodded the Duchess. “The cer'mony took place in a temple belonging to the Community, all painted over red and yellow triangles and things like T-squares. At the upper end was an altar, raised on three steps, and on this was the ground glass ball in which the Mystikos lived when he wasn't somewhere else, and an electric light was fixed over it, so that it just dazzled your eyes to look at. Below the altar was a seat for the Theologa, and, you bet, Mrs. Gideon J. Swale came out strong in the costume line. Momma was reminded of Titiens in *Norma*, she said.”

“I want to hear about the Demonstration,” pleaded Lady Sidonia plaintively.

"My! you're in a hurry," said the Duchess. "But it was to be brought off in a bath—if you must know!"

"A *bath*?"

"A bath that was full of water and boiled herbs, and had been properly incanted over by the Theologa," explained the Duchess. "There were incense-burners all round, and not far off a kind of tent of white linen, all over red triangles and T's. And the five candidates for renovation—I mean Momma and the other ladies—sat on a form, in bloomers, each with a little purse-bag containing bills for ten thousand dollars, and her heart full of hope and joy."

"*Oh!* go on," cried Lady Sidonia.

"The temple was circular, something like the Mormon Tabernacle at Salt Lake City," said the Duchess, "and the Occult Operatives—a round hundred of 'em—occupied the forms, to assist with the prayers and hymn-singin'. Of course, the proceedings began with a hymn sung in several different keys. I surmise the effect was impressive."

Lady Sidonia elevated her eyebrows.

"Momma said it was wailful, and made her feel as though live clams were crawling up and down her back. But then the bloomers may account for that," said the Duchess, "and I guess the temple registers were out of order. Then—the lights were suddenly turned out!"

"O-oh!" shivered Lady Sidonia.

"Except the electric stars over the Mystikos' crystal ball," went on the Duchess, "so that all the light in the temple seemed to come from the altar. Momma said that made her feel those crawling clams worse than ever."

"Could one see plainly what was going on?" asked Lady Sidonia.

"It was a religious kind of dimness," said the Duchess, "but most everything showed plainly. For instance, when the hideous woman who was to be the Subject of

the Demonstration came out of the linen tent in a suit of bloomers like Momma's and the others, she appeared to be plain enough. Do you keep a cat, dear?" whispered the Duchess.

"Why? No!" said Lady Sidonia.

"I thought I heard a scratching at the door," explained the Duchess, with her mouth close to Lady Sidonia's ear. "Don't open it. . . . I'd rather—Where was I?"

"The Subject was in bloomers," said Lady Sidonia.

"Oh, well! Momma and the other ladies were asked to look at her earnestly, to fix her features in their minds, so that they couldn't but recognize her again if they saw her. She was a slight woman, Momma said, about thirty-five, and but for her scarred face would have been pretty, with her pale complexion, brown wavy hair, and large gray eyes with black lashes. . . . She had one peculiarity about the left hand, which no one who ever saw it could forget. What are you listening for?"

"I hear something at the door," faltered Lady Sidonia in a nervous undertone.

"Fancy. You don't keep a cat. Well, the Subject went up to the altar and knelt, and the Theologa—Mrs. Gideon J. Swale—invoked the Mystikos in a solemn kind of conjuration, and the crystal ball on the altar began to hop up and down."

"No!"

"Fact! Then it rose right off the altar and hung suspended in the air, and the hymn broke out worse than ever, and the Theologa led the Subject down the altar steps and put her into the bath."

"Well?" gasped Lady Sidonia.

"The Theologa threw incense on the burners round the bath, and perfect clouds rose up all round it, completely hiding the Subject," explained the Duchess.

“Then she——”

“She began to scream.”

“To scream?”

“As if she was in absolute agony; and Momma and the four other ladies nearly fainted off their form, they were so perfectly terrified.”

“And—what happened?”

“There was a scream more piercing than any of the others.”

“Oh!”

“The clouds of incense became so thick that you couldn't see your hand.”

“And——”

“The Occult Operatives sang more loudly and less in tune than ever, and the crystal ball kept on jumping up and down. Then the clouds of smoke cleared away, and the lights went up, and——” The Duchess paused provokingly.

“Go on, go on!”

“And the Subject got out of the bath. . . . And she had been ugly and scarred when she went in, but now she was young and pretty!”

“Impossible!”

“It was the same woman to all appearances, but changed—wonderfully changed. The same pretty brown hair, the same eyes, gray, with long curly black lashes, and the same strange malformation of one finger of the left hand. But no cicatrices, none of the seams and marks that made the other frightful.”

“The other!”

“Did I say the other?”

“Certainly!”

“Then I guess I let the cat out of the bag.”

“Ah, I begin to understand!”

“I thought you'd tumble.”

“There were two women—exactly alike!”

“No, goosey! One woman younger than the other, and looking exactly like her, as *she* looked before the injury to her face.”

“Sisters?”

“No. Mother and daughter.”

“And the change in the bath?”

“Managed with a false bottom and trap exit. The sort of trick one sees exposed at the Egyptian Hall.”

“And the daughter took the mother’s place?”

“Under cover of the incense—and the singing. The tent held *two*, you understand.”

“But Mrs. Van Wacken?”

“Momma and the other ladies—once the thing had been proved genuine—were only too anxious to plank down their money and hop into the wonderful bath. So they went up to the Theologa, and she blessed them and laid the five money-bags on the altar, and then——”

“Then——”

“Then all the lights went out,” said the Duchess, “and there was a kind of stampede, and Momma and the four other ladies found themselves alone in the temple. The Theologa and the Subject and the hundred members of the Community who’d sat round on the seats and helped with the hymns were gone—and the dollar bags had vanished. The doors of the temple were locked, and Momma and the four other victims had to stop there until the morning. An express man heard their cries for help, broke in the door, and took them to an hotel in his wagon. Dear, I’m going to toddle to by-by!”

“It was an awful—awful swindle,” said Lady Sidonia, as she and the Duchess kissed good-night.

“And the exposure!” The Duchess shrugged her shoulders. “Momma and the other ladies wanted it hushed, but the police went into the matter.”

“Were the swindlers arrested?”

“The Theologa was caught at Amsterdam, and extra-

dited. The Community got off. Nobody could prove any of them had had any of the money. I guess," said the Duchess, yawning, "Mrs. Gideon J. Swale knows where it is. But she's in prison, now, dear. And I hope she likes it. As for the woman and her daughter, whose likenesses to each other had been made use of by Mrs. Gideon—they're still at large. Good-night."

"Do tell me," pressed Lady Sidonia. "That peculiarity of one finger of the left hand possessed by both mother and daughter—what was it?"

"It was," said the Duchess, "a double nail."

"How odd!" said Lady Sidonia. "My maid has the same queer deformity, and it is the only thing I don't like about her. . . . She hates to have it noticed."

"I guess she does," said the Duchess.

"Look at her hand to-morrow," said Lady Sidonia. "It's awfully queer. Don't forget."

"I won't," said the Duchess. "But she won't be here to-morrow!"

Lady Sidonia's eyes opened to their widest extent. "Won't—*be here?*"

"No. She is the girl who got out of the bath!"

"Good heavens!" cried Lady Sidonia. "How do you — Are you——"

"I had been shown her photograph by the police—recognized her the moment I saw her," said the Duchess. "I'm not mistaken any, you may be sure. But you needn't trouble about her. She's gone!"

"Gone!"

"She was listening at the door, and heard the whole story. When *you* spoke about the cat, she made tracks. She's clear of this house by now, you may bet your back teeth. Don't worry about her," said the Duchess. "I'll send my own maid to you in the morning. Good-night!"

THE BREAKING PLACE

Being a letter from Miss Tossie Trilbina, of No. 000, Giddingham Mansions, W., to the Editor of "The Keyhole," an illustrated Weekly Journal of Caterings for the Curious.

DEAR SIR,

Since reserve and reticence can be carried too far by a lady, I drop the present line of explanation, the newspapers having took so kind a interest in the differences between me and Lord Wretchingham. And if poets ask what's in a name, the experience of me and many another young lady whose talent for the Stage, developed by application and go-aheadness, not to say good luck—for that there is such a thing must be plain to the stubbornest person—has made her friends from the Orchestra—(you'd never guess how the Second Violin can queer you in an accomp. if you hadn't experienced it!)—to the highest row in the Threepenny Gallery at The Druids, or the shilling one at The Troc.—would answer, *more than people think for!*

My poor dear mother, who has been pretty nearly crazy about the affair, in that shrinking from publicity which is natural to a lady, told the young gentleman from *The Keyhole*, who dropped in on her at her little place at Brixton, to fish and find out for himself why the marriage-engagement between her daughter and his lordship should have been broken off on the very verge of the altar.

Of course, I don't assume his lordship's proposal

wasn't a compliment to a young lady in the Profession; but lordly roofs and music halls may cover vice or shelter virtue, as one of the serio characters so beautifully said in the autumn show at dear old Drury Lane, the name of which has slipped me. And I don't pretend that my deepest and holiest feelings were not wrenched a bit by me having to say in two words, after mutual vows and presents of the solemnest kind had been exchanged between me and Lord Wretchingham: "All is over between you and me for ever, Hildebrand; and if you possess the mind as well as the manners and appearance of a gentleman, you will not force me to give you the definite chuck."

He went on awfully, grinding the heels of his boots into a brand-new Wilton carpet, and telling me over and over that I had no heart and never loved him, concerning which I prefer to keep myself to myself. There are those that make as much noise when things go wrong with 'em as a one-and-fourpenny sparking-plug, and there are others that keep themselves to themselves and suffer in silence, of which I hope I am one. Even supposing my ancestry did not toddle over with Edward the Conqueror, which they may, for all I know.

It was on the very first night of the production of *The Pop-in-Taw Girl*, by the Trust or Bust Theatrical Syndicate, at the Hiram P. Goff Theatre, W., that Lord Wretchingham caught my eye. Musical Comedy is my strongest weakness, for though a principal boy's part, with heaps of changes, and electro-calcium with chromatic glasses for every song and dance touches the spot, pantomime is not so refined. Perhaps you may recall the record hits I made in "Freddy's Flannel Waistcoat Wilted in the Wash," and "Lay Your Head on My Shoulder, Dear." Not that it's my habit to refer to my successes, but the street organs alone will rub it in when you happen to be the idol of the hour.

He sat with his mouth wide open—of course, I refer to Lord Wretchingham—all the time yours truly was on the stage, and I will say no gentleman could have a more delicate regard for a young lady's feelings than his lordship did in sending a perfect haystack of the most expensive hothouse flowers addressed to Miss Tossie Trilbina, with a diamond and turquoise muffchain twined round the moss handle of the basket, and not a speck of address on the card for my poor dear mother to return the jewelry to, her being over and above particular, I have often thought, in discouraging attentions that only sprang from gentlemen's appreciation of the performance, and masked nothing the smallest objections could be taken to.

She quite warmed to Lord Wretchingham, I will say, when him being respectfully presented by the Syndicate, and me being recommended fresh country air by the doctors when suffering from tonsils in the throat, his lordship placed his motor-car at my disposal. With poor dear mother invariably in the glass compartment behind, the tongue of scandal could not possibly find a handle, and her astonishment when she discovered that Hildebrand regarded me with a warmer feeling than that of mere admiration gave her quite a turn.

We were formally engaged—me and Lord Wretchingham. We kept the thing so dark I cannot think how the newspapers managed to get hold of it. But a public favorite must pay the price of popularity in having her private affairs discussed by the crowd. My poor dear mother felt it, but there! what can you do? With interviewers calling same time as the milk, and Press snap-shotters lurking behind the laurel bushes in the front garden, is it to be wondered at that Hildebrand's family were apprised of our betrothal not only by pars., but by the publication of our photographs, taken hand-in-hand on my poor dear mother's doorstep, with a vine

climbing up behind us, Hildebrand's motor car, an 18.26 h. p. "Gadabout," at the bottom of the doorsteps, with the French *chofore parley-vousing* away a good one to the three Japanese pugs, and poor dear mother, looking a perfect lady, at her fancy-work, in the front parlor window. How the negative was obtained, and how it found its way into all the Illustrated Papers, and particularly how it got upon the postcards, I don't pretend to guess. It's one of those regular mysteries you come across in real life.

Hildebrand, or, possibly, as all is over, I should say Lord Wretchingham's family, went into perfect fits when the news of our betrothal leaked out. The Earl of Blandish, his father, raged like a mad bull; and the Countess, his mother, implored him on her knees to break the engagement.

"Oh," she said, with the tears in her eyes, "my own boy," she said, "do not, I beg of you," she said—for, of course, I got it all out of Hildebrand afterwards—"show yourself to be of so weak and unoriginal a cast of mind as to follow the example of the countless other young men of rank and property," she said, "who have contracted unequal and unhappy unions with young women on the boards," she said—and like her classy cheek! Upon which Lord Wretchingham calmly up and told her that his word was his bond, and that I had got both; my poor dear mother having insisted from the beginning that things should be set down in black and white, which the spelling of irrevokable almost proved a barrier the poor dear could not tackle, his education having been neglected at Eton to that extent.

Me and my poor dear mother being—I don't mind telling you on the strict—prepared for a struggle with Wretchingham's family, was more than surprised when, after a Saturday to Monday of anxious expectancy, a note on plain paper with a coronet stamped in white

from Lady Blandish informed us that her ladyship had made up her mind to call. And she kept the appointment as punctual as clockwork, driving up in a taxi, and perfectly plainly dressed; and when I made my entrance in the dearest morning arrangement of Valenciennes lace and baby ribbon you ever saw, I will say she met me like a lady should her son's intended, and said that Lord Blandish and her had come to the determination to make the best of their son's choice, and invited me down to stay at Blandish Towers, in Huntshire, when the run of *The Pop-in-Taw Girl* broke off for the autumn holidays.

"Oh," I said, "Lady Blandish," I said, "of course, I shall be perfectly delighted," and let her know how unwilling I felt as a lady to make bad blood between Lord Wretchingham and his family. "But, of course," I said, "my duty to the man who I have vowed to love and honor leaves me no choice."

"My dear Miss Tossie Trilbina," she said, "your sentiments towards Wretchingham do you the utmost credit," she said, and I explained to her that though the surname sounds foreign, there is nothing of the Italiano-ice-creamo about yours truly.

"Oh!" she said, in that sweetly nasty way that the Upper Ten do seem to have the knack of, "do not trouble to explain, my dear Miss Trilbina. Lord Blandish and myself are quite prepared," she said, "to accept the inevitable," she said, and kissed me, and smiled a great deal at my poor dear mother, who was explaining to her ladyship that her family did not regard an alliance with the aristocracy as anything but a match between equals, and that my education had been of the most expensive and classy kind you can imagine. And smiled herself into her taxi, and motored away.

That was in the middle of the summer season, and

I bespoke my costumes for my visit to my new relations next day. Of course, I expected a house-party of really hall-marky, classy swells, and meant to do the honors and help Lady Blandish to entertain as was my duty bound. And my shooting and golfing and angling costumes, and motoring get-up and riding-habit, and tea-gowns and dinner-dresses and ball-confections, were a fair old treat to see, and did Madame Battens credit.

Wretchingham drove me down in his 18.26 h.p. "Gad-about," with my dresser-maid in the glass case behind, and an omnibus motor from the garage behind us with my dressing-baskets, and I thought of poor dear mother at home, I don't mind telling you, when the Towers rose up at the end of an oak avenue longer than Regent Street, and Wretchingham's two sisters came running down the steps to hug their brother and be presented to their new sister, and the white-headed family butler threw a glass door open and Wretchingham led me in between six footmen, bowing, three on each side.

What price poor little me when I heard there wasn't any House-Party? Cheap wasn't the word, with all those costumes in my dress-baskets. However, I faked myself up in a frock that I really felt was a credit to a person of my rank and station, and swam down to what her ladyship called a "quiet family dinner."

The Earl of Blandish came in, leaning on his secretary's arm, with a gouty foot, and did the heavy father, calling me "my dear." I sat on his lordship's right hand, and certainly he was most agreeable, telling me the black oak carvings in the great hall were by Jacob Bean, and that the walled garden with a separate division for every month in the year and a bowling alley in the middle had been made by a lady ancestor of his who lived in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was a friend of the person who wrote Shakespeare.

"Oh!" I said, "I suppose," I said, "in those days

bowls were not considered a low form of amusement. Though if ever my poor dear mother and father did have to call words, it would be over his weakness for bowls and skittles as a waste of time and leading to betting and drink. And as for Shakespeare, I call it all very well for literary swells with nothing else to do," I said, "but what the Halls cater for is the business gentleman who drops in with a pal to hear the popular favorite in a ten-o'clock turn over a cigar and a small Scotch. And gardening never was much in my line," I said, "though when a child it was my favorite amusement to grow mustard and cress on damp flannel. Hunting is my passion," I said, "and as Wretchingham has told me you keep a first-class stable of hunters and hacks, besides carriage beasts, I hope to show your lordship that I shan't disgrace you," I said, and asked him when the next meet would be?

The Earl's old eyebrows went up to the top of his aristocratic bald forehead as he said not until October, and then only for cubbing, and the two girls flushed up red, trying not to laugh, and wriggled in their chairs, and Lady Blandish said in her nice nasty way that every day brought innovations, and one might as well ride to hounds in August as skate on artificial ice in May.

"And if you are fond of sport," Lord Blandish said, "we could possibly find you some fishing. Don't you think so, my dear?" and he looked at his wife.

"I have my salmoning costume with me," I said, just to let them know, "and a rod, and everything. And I suppose Wretchie won't object," I said, giving the poor thing a smile, "to prompt me if I am fluffy in the business."

"Dear me!" said Lady Blandish, "how stupid of me not to have explained before," she said, "that this is a trouting County and not a salmon County, and that such

trout as there are run very small." And the two girls choked again in the most underbred way I ever.

I said I'd fall back on golf, having a killing get-up in my basket, but there wasn't a links within miles, Lady Blandish said, and how sorry she was. All the hot-weather entertainment she had it in her power to offer me in their quiet country home, she said, was an occasional flower-show, or County cricket-match, or a garden-party, or a friendly dinner with people who were not *too* exacting. In September there would be the birds, but then I would not be there. It was too unfortunate, she said. Not that her saying so took me in much.

I thought the top of my head would have come off with yawning that evening, I really did; and when I remembered that there were three weeks more of it before me I could have screamed out loud. Me and Wretchingham went for a spin in his T-cart next morning before lunch, and that drive settled me in deciding to off it on the next chance.

"Tossie darling," said the poor dear thing, "it has gratified my father exceedingly to ascertain," he said, "that you are fond of the country; because a condition of the provision he is willing to make for us when we are married," he said—and he would have put his arm round my waist only the trotter shied—"is that we reside at the Dower House," he said, "twenty miles from here, and lead a healthy life in accordance with his views as regards what is appropriate for future land-owners who will one day hold a solid stake in the County. Of course, you will leave the Stage forever, my darling," he said, "as a future Countess of Blandish cannot figure upon the Lyric Boards," he said, "without in some degree compromising her reputation and bringing discredit upon the family of which," he said, "she has become a member. My father will allow us two thou-

sand a year at first," he said, "which will enable us to keep a couple of motor-cars and a hack or two, and with an occasional week-end in Town, I have no doubt," he said, "that our married life will be," he said, "one of ideal happiness for both of us. You observe," he said, pointing with his whip straight over the trotter's ears, "that rather low-pitched stone building of the Grange description down in that wooded hollow there? The house is quite commodious," he said. "You will appreciate the exceptional garden; and as there is a good deal of arable land comprised," he said, "in the estate, I shall take up farming," he said, "with enthusiasm."

"You may take up farming," I said haughtily, "with enthusiasm, dear old boy; but what I say is, you will not take it up with yours truly! Do you suppose in cold blood that Tossie Trilbina is the sort of girl to sit down in the middle of a ploughed field and lead a life of ideal happiness with a farming husband in gaiters," I said, tossing my head, "telling me how the turnips are looking every evening at dinner, and taking me up to Town for a week-end," I said, "every now and then as a treat? No, Hildebrand," I said, "clearly understand, much as I regret to say it, that I am not taking any; and unless the old gentleman can be brought to see the reason," I said, "of a flat in Mayfair, all is over betwixt me and you, and I shall go back to my poor dear mother by to-night's express," I said, "if the lacerated state of your feelings does not permit," I said, "of your taking the steering-wheel."

Of course, the poor dear thing was dreadfully upset, and did his little best to bring Lord Blandish to weaken on his spiteful old determination; and Lady Blandish said heaps of nice-sounding nasty things, and the two girls tried to be sympathetic and not to look as if they

were really ready to jump for joy. But the Earl remained relentless, and Lord Wretchingham is free. I must now close. Hoping you will accept this explanation in the spirit in which it is made,

I remain, dear Sir, yours respectfully,

TOSSIE TRILBINA.

A LANCASHIRE DAISY

ONE of the giant police-constables on duty outside the Cotton Hall, Smutchester, upon the occasion of the Conference of the National Union for the Emancipation of Women Workers, was seized with the spirit of prophecy when he saw Sal o' Peg's borne in, gesticulating, declaiming, carried head and shoulders above an insurging wave of beshawled and rampant factory-girls.

"Theeaw goes th' Stormy Pettrill, Tum!" he roared to a fellow guardian of the public peace. "Neeaw us be sewer to ha' trooble wi' theeay——" He did not add "tykes."

"Thee mun be misteeawken, mon," urged Tum, who had newly joined the Smutchester City Division. "'Tis boh a lil' feer-feaced gell aw cud braak between ma finger an' thoomb lig a staalk o' celery." The great blue eyes of the "lil' feer-feaced gell" had done execution, it was plain, and the first speaker, who was a married man, snorted contemptuously. Sal o' Peg's had completely earned the disturbing nickname bestowed on her. The courts and alleys of the roaring black city would vomit angry, white-gilled, heavy-shod men and women at one shrill, summoning screech of hers. The police-constable upon whose features she had more recently executed a clog war-dance was not yet discharged from the Infirmary, though the seventeen years and fragile proportions of his assailant had, for the twentieth time, softened "th' Beawk" into letting Sal o' Peg's off with the option of a fortnight or a fine, and the threat of being

bound over to keep the peace next time, if she insisted in being "so naughty."

With these blushing honors thick upon her, Sal o' Peg's attended the Conference, and became, before the close of the presidential address, an ardent convert to the cause of Female Suffrage. During the debate she climbed a pillar and addressed the meeting, and when, with immense difficulty, dislodged from her post of vantage, she took the platform by storm.

"Why, it's a child!" chorused the delegates from the different branches of the Union, whose ramifications extend over the civilized globe, as the small, slim, light-haired young person in the inevitable shawl, print gown, and clogs climbed over the brass platform-rail, and, folding cotton-blouse-clad arms upon a flat, girlish bosom, stood motionless, composed, even cheerful, in the full glare of the electric chandelier, and under the full play of a battery of some two thousand feminine eyes.

"Do let the little darling speak," begged the Honorary Secretary of the Chairwoman, who, as a native of Smutchester, had her doubts. But Sal o' Peg's had not the faintest intention of waiting for permission.

"Ah'm not bit o' good at long words, gells," said Sal o' Peg's. "Mappen ah'll be better ondersteawd wi'oot 'em."

The thunder of clogs in the body of the hall said "Yes!" She went on: "Wimmin sheawd ha' th' Vote. 'Tis theear roight." (Tremendous clogging, mingled with shrieks of "Weel seayd, lass! Gie us th' Vote!") She hitched her shawl about her with the factory-girl's movement of the shoulders, and went on. "Yo'll noan fleg me wi' yo're din. Ah'm boh a lil' un, boh af ha' got spunk. If you doubt thot—" A hundred strident voices from the body of the hall sent back the refrain, "Ask a pleeceman!" A roar of laughter shook the roof.

“Ought we to interfere?” whispered the Honorary Secretary.

“My dear, why should we?” said a London delegate, leaning forward to answer. “The girl has got them in the hollow of her hand. A born leader of women—a born leader. She voices in her untaught speech the heart-cry of thousands of her dumb and helpless sisters. She——”

The born leader of women continued:

“Ah dunno whoy ah niver thout o’ it before, but ’tis a beawrfeaced robbery neawt to gie us th’ Vote. Oor feythers has it, an’ sells it fur braass.” (Screams, shrieks, and clogging.) “Oor heawsbands has it, an’ sells it fur braass.” (Tempestuous applause.) “Oor lads, theay has it, an’ sells it fur braass. Whoy shouldna’ *we* ha’ it, an’ sell it for braass tew?”

The enthusiasm with which this brilliant peroration was received nearly wrecked the Cotton Hall. No more speeches were heard that night, though several were delivered in dumb show, and Sal o’ Peg’s awakened upon the morrow to find her utterances reported in the newspapers. To the sarcasm of the leader-writer Sal o’ Peg’s was impervious. She “mun goo t’ Lunnon neixt,” she said, “an’ leawt them tykes at the Hoose o’ Commeawns know a bit” of her mind. She wasn’t afraid of Prime Ministers—not she. She called at the branch office of the Union twice a day, imperatively requesting to be forwarded as a delegate to the Metropolis. When her services were declined with thanks, she harangued the populace from the doorstep. When politely requested to move on, she broke a window with one clog, and patted the office-boy violently upon the head with the other. Then she burst into tears and retired, supported by a dozen or so of sympathizing comrades of the factory.

“ ’Tis a beeawrnin’ sheame!” they said, as they fastened up their chosen representative’s loosened flaxen

coils with hairpins of the patent explosive kind, contributed from their own solid braids. "But donnot thee fret, Sal o' Peg's, us'll ha' nah dollygeat but thee, sitha lass!" And they sent the hat round among themselves with right good-will. They were not quite sure what a "dollygeat" was, but thought it was something that could walk into the House of Commons, defy a Minister to his nose, dance a clog-dance in the gangway of the Upper House, and receive in chests and bagsful all the good money that women had been defrauded of since the masculine voter first plumped for a consideration; of that they were "as sure as deeawth."

So Sal o' Peg's gave notice at the factory that, being thenceforth called to figure upon the arena of political life, she could not tend frames any longer. She bought a black sailor straw hat with a portion of the subscribed fund, and tied up the most cherished articles of her wardrobe in a blue-spotted handkerchief bundle. She traveled express to London, choosing a "smoking third," as affording atmospherical and social conditions less remote from her life-long experience. . . . The journey was purely uneventful: a young man of unrestrained amorous proclivities receiving a black eye, and a young woman who sneered too openly at the blue-spotted handkerchief bundle suffering the wreck of a bandbox and sustaining a few scratches. The guard—alas! for the frailty of man—being all upon the side of the blue eyes and flaxen coils of hair. . . .

I suppose the reader knows Pelham's Inn, W. C., where are the headquarters of the National Union for the Emancipation of Working Women? There is no padding to the armchairs, cocoanut matting of a severe and rasping character covers the Committee-room boards; the Committee inkstand is of the zinc office description (the Committee are not there to be comfortable—just the reverse). They are busy women of small

spare time and narrow spare means; but when they found Sal o' Peg's sitting on the doorstep, they found leisure to be kind. They looked at the clogs with pity, unaware of the *pas seul* they had performed upon the countenance of a policeman still in bandages, and the great blue eyes yearning out of the small pale face, and the ropes of fair hair tumbling over the shabby shawl that enfolded the childish figure of the little factory-girl who had traveled up to London for the sake of the Cause, won them to practical expression of the sympathy they felt.

“So different a type to the brawling, violent creature,” they said, “who nearly caused a riot at the Smutchester Conference. Her one dream is to see the House of Commons and speak a word in public for her toiling sisters of the factories.” And those of them who wore glasses found them dimmed with the dews of sympathetic emotion. It was such a touching story, they said, of faith and enthusiasm and courage.

It is upon the Records of the Nation that the events I have to relate took place in the Central Hall of the sacred fane of Westminster between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, when twenty or thirty ladies, well-known adherents of the Cause, appeared upon the scene and asked for Suffrage. It was an act of presumption, almost of treason, bordering on blasphemy. Still, the arguments that were not drowned were sound. They were all householders, taxpayers, earners, and owners of independent incomes one daring female said, and as the drunken husband of her charwoman possessed a vote, she thought she had a right to have one also. The Sergeant-at-Arms instantly directed a constable to quell her. Another audacious creature asked for the Vote Qualified. She demanded that the Suffrage should indeed be given to women, but only to those women who should, by passing a *viva voce* examination on the duties of citizenship,

prove themselves fit to discharge them. . . . She was listened to with some attention until she suggested that male voters should be subjected to a similar weeding-out process; upon which a portly inspector bore down upon her, clasped her in a blue embrace, and carried her, protesting loudly, down the hall, amidst demonstrations of intense excitement. Members cried, "Shame!" Members cried, "Serve her right!" Passing peers put up eye-glasses and stayed to see the fun. Hustled women shrieked, "Cowards!" Pushed women cried, "Let us alone!" Punched women only said, "Owch!" . . . It was freely translated "Wretch!" for the occasion. The middle-aged and advanced in years met the same treatment as the younger and more excitable. . . . All were unceremoniously expelled by the stalwart beings in blue from the sacred precincts where such inviolable order is habitually maintained, and where all the Proprieties find their permanent home. Crushed headgear, scattered handbags, and strange derelict fragments of feminine attire bestrewed the scene of the one-sided fray; the crowds of sympathizers outside cried, "Boo!" and waved white flags in defiance as a dozen arrests were made in a dozen seconds. . . . And a young woman in a brown plaid shawl and brass-bound clogs danced with shoutings upon the pavements of St. Stephen's Porch, and while her long, light coils of hair came down and her hairpins were scattered to the winds of Westminster, she asked, in the Lancashire dialect, for admittance to the Bar of the House; for justice for the oppression and downtrodden; for the blood of Ministers, Peers, and Members; and for the viscera of the officials who were their tools. She told the Chancellor of the Exchequer to come out and bring the Treasury with him; and when he did not come, she knocked off one policeman's helmet and smote another with one of her clogs—*toujours* those

clogs!—upon the nose. Also she relieved a third of half a whisker, bit another in the hand, kicked them all in the shins, and generally made history as six police-constables bore her, shrieking at the full pitch of excellent lungs, to Blunderbuss Row Police Station.

There were newspaper headlines next day—“Bedlam Let Loose!” “The Shrieking Sisterhood!” “The Termagant Spirit!” “No Choice but to Use Force!” The arrested demonstrators were paraded at the police-court; the damaged policemen made an imposing show. Tears choked the utterance of Mr. Vincent Squeers, presiding magistrate, as he asked: “Were thee, indeed, women who had abraded the features, discolored the eyes, bruised the shins, and plucked the whiskers from the gallant constables who stood before him? Nay, but Mæ-nads, Bacchantes, priestesses of savage rites, unsexed Amazons—in two words, emancipated females!” He found a melancholy relief in imposing a fine that had no precedent in cases of brawling, or fourteen days’ imprisonment. He should not be surprised to hear that these hunters after vulgar notoriety preferred to go to Holloway, to luxuriate on prison fare, enjoy calm, undeserved repose on straw beds, and clothe their unregenerate limbs with the drab garments generously provided by the nation.

“But there is one among you,” cried Mr. Vincent Squeers, “who has been innocently led away by your pernicious example, but whom the spirit of Justice, that dwells in the bosom of every Englishman, that hovers, genius-like, above this Bench to-day”—the chief clerk hastily produced a white handkerchief, and the reporters shook freedom into the flow of their Geyser pens—“will stretch forth a hand to protect and to aid. I speak of this simple, artless child. . . .” A police-constable felt his nose, and another groped for his missing whisker

as Sal o' Peg's stood up in the dock. "Lured from her humble home, from her laborious employment, from her upright-minded, honest associates, by these immodest and unwomanly women, cast a stranger upon the streets of London, this simple country blossom, wilting in the atmosphere tainted by habitual vice and common crime, appeals to the chivalry of every honest man who ever had a mother"—the chief clerk was carried from the court in hysterics—"ay, to the pity of every woman who is not bereft of that heavenly attribute."

"Sheawt opp, thee donowt owd hosebird!" said Sal o' Peg's. "Dosta think ah niver weur in a teawzle in th' streeawts or a skirmidge wi' th' police afeore? Dustha see th' pickle theam girt big cheawps is in? If they saay they got theawee scratts an' sogers fra' eany wench but Sal o' Peg's, they be leears aw! Sitha? An' as to yon weumen an' lasses, yo ca' baad neams, I ha' nowt o' truck wi' they. I coom to Lunnon as a dolly-geat fra myseln. Sitha?"

"The child speaks only the roughest dialect of her native Lancashire," continued Mr. Vincent Squeers, "which, I own, I am unable to comprehend. How could the hapless young creature understand the poisonous shibboleth poured into her ears by the abandoned sisterhood whose leading evil spirits are now before me? They have denied all knowledge of or connection with her"—(as indeed they had)—"her who stands here—oh, shame and utter disgrace!—in the dock of a police court as a result of their vile and treacherous usage in dragging her from her home. She is sufficiently punished by this outrage upon that innate modesty which is as the bloom upon the peach, the—er, ah!—dew upon the daisy. Fined three-and-sixpence, and I will order that the same be discharged out of the Court poor-box. The Missionary will now take charge of the poor young creature, who will, I trust—ah!—be returned to her sorrowing family

in the course of the next twenty-four hours. Good-day, my dear child—good-day!”

A clog whizzed from the dock and hit the paneling behind the Bench. The Magistrate looked another way, the constables coughed behind their large white gloves as Sal o' Peg's, weeping bitterly, was led away by the Court Missionary, a bearded person in rusty black, with a felt pudding-basin hat and a soiled white necktie. Robbed of the glory of battle, denied her meed of acknowledgment for doughty deeds achieved, bereft of her Amazonian reputation, Sal o' Peg's felt that life was "scarcelin's weath livin'." And the afternoon newspapers administered the final blow. Every leader-writer shed tears of pure ink over the child lured from home, the "daisy with the dew upon it" sprouted in a dozen paragraphs. Only in Smutchester there was Homeric jest and uproarious laughter. The girls of the cotton-mills, the policemen of the Lower Town—these knew their Sal o' Peg's, and were loud in their appreciation of the satiric humor of the London newspapers. The Missionary did not see his precious charge into the train for Smutchester; a clergyman's daughter, who had come into accidentally compromising relations with an American gentleman's diamond evening solitaire and "wad" of banknotes, urgently required his ministrations. So a burly police-constable, with one whisker and a sore place on the denuded cheek, performed the charitable office. In the four-wheeler, turning into the Euston Road, Sal o' Peg's said suddenly:

"Thoo wastna' sheaved this mearnin', lad?"

"I 'adn't no time, for one thing," said the police-constable sulkily; "an' for another, I 'ad to keep this whisker on as evidence that you'd pulled out the other. And a lot o' good evidence does when Old Foxey"—this was the nickname bestowed upon Mr. Vincent Squeers by the staff of the Court—" 'as made up 'is

mind not to listen to it." He rubbed the remaining whisker thoughtfully.

"Eh, laad, laad!" cried Sal o' Peg's, bursting into tears and falling upon the neck of the astonished police-constable, "but theaw knows ah did it. Theaw said sa just neaw. Eh, laad, laad!"

"Are you a-crying?" asked the police-constable, over whose blue tunic meandered the heavy twists of fair hair which invariably tumbled down under stress of Sal o' Peg's emotion. "Are you a-crying because you're sorry you pulled out my whisker, or glad as that you did it? Which?"

Sal o' Peg's lifted radiant, tearful blue eyes to the burly police-constable's, which were little and piggish, but twinkling with something more than mere reproof.

"Ah be gleawd," said Sal o' Peg's simply.

"Very well," said the police-constable, who was not only a man after all, but a bachelor. He put a large blue arm round the slim little figure of the war-goddess. "You've 'ad my whisker; *I'll 'ave a kiss.*"

"Teawk it, laad," said Sal o' Peg's.

Hitherto, in her short but vivid experience of life, policemen had occupied a different plane, moved in another sphere. They were beings to dodge, defy, jeer at, and punch when you could get them down. Flower-pots were kept on window-sills of upper floors expressly for dropping on their helmets. She had danced upon the upturned face of one, given another a swollen nose, distributed bites and shin-kicks impartially among others. This Lunnon one had kissed her for pulling out his whisker. She looked at him with melting eyes. The hitherto impregnable bastion of her heart was taken—and by a member of the Force.

"When tha dost sheave, laad, send tha whisker to Ah by peawst. Th' address be Sal o' Peg's, Briven's Buildin's, Clog Ceawrt, East Side, Smutchester!"

“I won’t *send* it, you pretty little bit o’ frock,” said the enamored police-constable. “I’ll wait till my next leave an’——”

“Brenge it *then*, laad,” sighed Sal o’ Peg’s.

A PITCHED BATTLE

THE great Maestro sat at the piano, a small, square instrument. Upon it were piles of music, a bottle of Rhine wine, half emptied, a cup of black coffee, a plate of sliced garlic sausage, and a roll of black bread, peppered outside with aniseed. A bottle of ink was balanced on the music-desk, a blotted scroll of paper obscured the yellowed keyboard. As the great composer worked at the score of his new opera, he breakfasted, taking draughts from the bottle, bites of sausage and bread, and sips of coffee at discretion. He was a quaint, ungainly figure, with vivacious eyes, and his ill-fitting auburn wig had served him, like the right lapel of his plaid dressing-gown, for a pen-wiper for uncounted years.

The Maestro was not alone in the dusty studio to which so many people, both of the great and little worlds, sought entrance in vain. An olive-skinned youth, shabbily dressed in a gray paletot over a worn suit of black—a young fellow of sixteen, with a square, shaggy black head and a determined chin, the cleft in which was rapidly being hidden by an arriving beard—leaned against a music-stand crammed with portly volumes, his dark eyes anxiously fixed upon the old gentleman at the piano, who dipped in the ink and wrote, and wrote, and dipped in the ink, occasionally laying down the pen to strike a chord or two, in seeming forgetfulness of his visitor.

Suddenly the Maestro's face beamed with a cheerful smile.

“There, mon cher Gladiali!” He handed the newly-written sheet of music to the boy, and spread his wrinkled fingers above the keys. “This is the great aria-solo I spoke of. Sing that at sight—your training should make such a task an easy one—and let us see what stuff you are made of. *Allons!*” And he struck the opening chord.

Carlo Gladiali turned pale and then red. He crossed himself hastily, grasped the sheet of paper, cast his eyes over it anxiously, and, meeting with a smiling glance the glittering old eyes of the Maestro, he inflated his deep chest and sang. A wonderful tenor voice poured from his boyish throat; heart and soul shone in his eyes and thrilled in his accents. Tears of delight dropped upon the piano-keys and upon the hands of the composer, and when the last pure note soared on high and swelled and sank, and the song ceased, the old musician cried: “Thou art a treasure! Come, let me embrace thee!” and clasped the young singer to his breast. “Once more, *mon fils*—once more!”

And as he seated himself at the piano, sweeping the plate of sausage into the wastepaper-basket with a flourish of the large, snuff-stained yellow silk handkerchief with which he wiped his eyes, the door, which had been left ajar, was flung open, and a little dark-eyed, fair-haired girl, who carried a Pierrot-doll, ran quickly into the room.

“Marraine brought me; she is panting up the stairs because she is so fat and they are so steep. Oldest Papa——” she began; but the Maestro held up his hand for silence as the song recommenced. More assurance was in Carlo’s phrasing; the flexibility and brilliancy of his voice were no longer marred by nervousness. As the solo reached its triumphant close, the Maestro said, slapping the boy on the back and taking a gigantic pinch of snuff:

“The Archangel Gabriel might have done better. Aha!” He turned, chuckling, to the little girl, who stood on one leg in the middle of the narrow room, pouting and dangling her Pierrot. “*La petite* there is jealous. Is it not so?”

“Oldest Papa, you make a very big mistake!” returned the little maiden, pouting still more. “I am not jealous of anybody in the world—least of all, a boy like that!” Her dark eyes rested contemptuously on the big, shy, square-headed fellow in the gray paletot.

“A boy, she calls him!” chuckled the Maestro. “*Ma mignonne*, he is sixteen—six years older than thyself! Hasten to grow up, become a great *prima donna*, and he shall sing Romeo to thy Juliette—I predict it!”

“I had rather sing with my cat!” observed the little lady rudely.

Carlo flushed crimson; the Maestro chuckled; and a stout lady who had followed her, panting, into the room, murmured, “*Oh! la méchante!*” adding, as the Maestro rose to greet her: “But she grows more incorrigible every day. This morning she pulled the feathers out of Coco’s tail because he whistled out of tune.”

The elfin face of the small sinner dimpled into mischievous smiles.

“But that was not being as wicked as the Maestro, who got angry at rehearsal, and hit the flute-player on the head with his *bâton*, so that it raised a hump. You told me that yourself, and how the Maestro——”

“Quite true, *petite*; I did fetch him a rap, I promise you, and afterwards I put bank-notes for a hundred francs on the lump for a plaster. But come, now, sing to me, and we will give Signor Carlo here something worth hearing. *Écoutez, mon cher!*”

“Very well, I will sing; but, first, Pierrot must be comfortably seated. That little armchair is just what he likes!” And, as quick as thought, the willful little

lady tilted a pile of music out of the little armchair upon the floor. Then she placed Pierrot very carefully in his throne, and, bidding him be very good and listen, because his *bonne petite Maman* was going to sing him something pretty, she tripped to the piano, and demurely requested the aged musician to accompany her in the Rondo of "Sonnambula."

Ah! what a miraculous voice proceeded from that small, willful throat! Stirred to the depths by the extraordinary power and beauty of the child's delivery, Carlo Gladiali listened enthralled; and when the last notes rippled from the pretty red lips of the now demure little creature, the big boy, forgetting her rudeness and his own shyness, started forward, and, sinking on one knee and seizing the small hand of the child-singer, he kissed it impulsively, crying: "Ah, Signorina, you were right, a thousand times! Compared with you, I sing like a cat!"

"Oh, no! I did not mean to say that!" the tiny lady was beginning graciously, when the Maestro broke in:

"You both sing like cherubs and say civil things to one another. One day you will sing like angels—and quarrel like devils! Please Heaven, you will both make your *début* under my *bâton*, and then, if I crack a flute-player's head, it will be for joy."

* * * * *

Ten years had elapsed. Carlo Gladiali had risen to pre-eminence as a public singer, had attained the prime of his powers and the apogee of his fame. Courted, fêted, and adored, the celebrated tenor, sated with success, laden with gifts, *blasé* with admiration, retained a few characteristics that might remind those who had known and loved him in boyhood of the ingenuous, honest, simple Carlo of ten years ago.

Certainly Carlo's jealousy of the *prima donna* who should dare to usurp a greater share of the public plaud-

its than he himself received was childish in its unreasonableness, and Othello-like in its tragic intensity.

At first, he would join in the compliments, and smile patronizingly as he helped the successful *débutante* to gather up the bouquets. Then his admiration would cool; he would tolerate, endure, then sneer, and finally grind his teeth. He would convey to the audience over one shoulder that they were idiots to applaud, and wither the triumphant *cantatrice* with a look of infinite contempt over the other. He had been known to feign sleep in the middle of a great soprano aria which, against his wish, had been encored. He had—or it was malevolently reputed so—bribed the hotel waiter to place a huge dish of macaroni, dressed exquisitely and smoking hot, in the way of a voracious contralto who within two hours was to essay for the first time the arduous rôle of Brynhild. The macaroni had vanished, the contralto had failed to appear. Numerous were the instances similar to these recorded of the tenor Gladiali, and repeated in every corner of the opera-loving world.

But it was in London, where the great singer was “starring” during the Covent Garden Season of 19—, that the haughty and intolerant Carlo was to meet his match.

At rehearsal one morning, Rebelli, the famous basso, said to Gladiali, with a twinkle: “A new ‘star’ has dawned on the operatic horizon. La Betisi, the pretty little soprano with the fiend’s temper and the seraph’s voice, has created a furore at Rome and Milan. She will ‘star’ over here in her successful rôles. I have it from the impresario himself.”

“*Ebbene!*” Carlo shrugged his shoulders and smiled with superb patronage. “We shall be very glad to welcome the little one. . . . Artists should know how to value genius in others.”

“How well you always express things!” said Rebelli,

grinning. "She is to sing Isolina in 'Belverde' on the 10th. The Spanish *prima donna* has broken her contract. As Galantuomo, you will have an excellent opportunity of judging of her talents," he added, as he turned away, "and scowling at the lady."

But Carlo did not scowl at first. He was all engaging courtesy and cordial welcome at the first rehearsal, when he was presented ceremoniously to a tiny little lady with willful dark eyes, pouting scarlet lips, and hair as golden as her own Neapolitan sunshine. She vaguely reminded the tenor of somebody he had seen before.

"The Maestro is coming from Naples to conduct," he heard Rebelli say. "He vowed that La Betisi should make her *début* under no *bâton* save his own. Her rôle will be Isolina in his 'Belverde,' in which, you know, she created such a sensation at La Scala."

"And you, Signor, are to sing the great part of Galantuomo in the 'Belverde'?" said the Betisi demurely to Gladiali. "This time I will not say, '*I had rather sing with my cat!*'"

Carlo started. Yes; there was no mistaking the willful mouth and the flashing defiant eyes. The little girl who had sung so divinely in the Maestro's dusty room ten years ago was the new operatic "star." But he was not jealous of the Betisi as yet. He said the most exquisite things—as only an Italian can say them—and bowed over her hand.

"The Signorina has fulfilled the glorious promise of her childhood and the prophecy of the Maestro," he said. "She who once sang like a cherub now sings like an angel. I am dying to hear you!" he added.

"Ah!" cried the Betisi with a little trill of laughter, "if you are dying now, what will you do afterwards?" The speech might have meant much or nothing, and, though Carlo Gladiali winced a little, he made no comment.

A few rehearsals later a cloud of snuff enveloped him, and he was clasped in the arms of a brown great-coat of antique design. Add, above, a gray woolen comforter and a traveling cap with ear-pieces, and, below, a pair of green trousers, ending in cloth boots with patent-leather toecaps, and you have the portrait of the Maestro in traveling costume.

“Heaven be praised, my dear Carlino, that I have lived to see this day! . . . Have you renewed acquaintance with my little witch, my enchanted bird, my drop of singing-water? Embrace, my children; your Maestro wishes it!”

And Gladioli touched the cheek of Emilia Betisi with his lips. Her sparkling eyes looked mockingly into his. Then the Maestro, who spoke not a word of English, scrambled to the conductor's chair, and commenced to harangue the musicians who constituted the orchestra in a fluent conglomeration of several other languages, and the rehearsals of “Belverde” began.

The new soprano and the new opera made an instantaneous and unparalleled “hit.” Carlo helped to pick up La Betisi's bouquets, and made a pretty speech to her at the final descent of the curtain. But his heart was not in his eyes or on his lips.

Upon the second representation, he yawned in the middle of Isolina's great aria, and he openly sneered at the audience for encoring the song three times. In the last Act, in the Garden Scene, which offered the principal opportunity for the display of the new *prima donna's* art, Carlo sucked jujubes, and openly wore one in his cheek while receiving, as Galantuomo, from the maddened Isolina the most feverish protestations of love. He noted something more than feigned frenzy in the flaming black eyes of the Betisi at this juncture, and, somewhat unwisely, permitted himself to smile. Next moment he received a deep scratch upon the cheek,

which tingled for a moment, then bled copiously, obliging the tenor to sing the final Romanza with a handkerchief to his face.

“Convey to Signor Gladiali my profoundest apologies,” said the Betisi to her dresser. “He will really think that he was singing a duet with a cat! But the next performance goes better.” Her dark eyes gleamed, her red lips smiled. She thirsted for the second representation.

So did Carlo. He had thought out a few little things calculated to drive a *cantatrice* to the pitch of desperation. For instance, at the second encore of her great song, separated only by a duet from *his* great song in the First Act, he would fetch a chair and sit down. Aha!

But—whether his intention had leaked out through Rebelli, to whom in a moment of champagne he had confided it, or whether the Betisi was in league with demons, let it be decided—it was she who fetched, not a chair, but a three-legged stool, and sat down on it in the middle of his first encore. And so charming an air of patience did she assume, and so genuine seemed her pity for the deluded public who had redemanded the song, that Signor Carlo, who wore a strip of black Court plaster on one cheek, nearly had an apoplexy. He meant to eat jujubes through *her* great song, but the Betisi was prepared. She produced a box and offered them to him, singing all the while more brilliantly than she had ever sung before; and when the house rose at her in rapture and demanded an encore, she tripped and fetched the three-legged stool and gave it, with a triumphant curtsy, to the foaming Galantuomo. And the crowded house roared with delight.

But the punishment of Carlo came in the Second Act. In the celebrated Garden Scene, where slighted love drives Isolina into temporary madness, she not only

scratched her Galantuomo on the other cheek, but pulled his wig off. And in the crowning scene, where Isolina reveals herself as the daughter of the King, and summons the Court to witness the humiliation of Galantuomo by beating on a gong which is suspended from a tree, came the Betisi's great opportunity. Running through the most difficult passages of the arduous *scena* with the greatest nonchalance, disposing of octaves, double octaves, and ranging from *sol* to *si-flat* in the violin-clef with the utmost ease, she electrified and enthralled her hearers; and, in the *gusto* of singing, when the moment arrived for striking on the gong previously referred to, she missed the instrument, and struck the tenor violently upon the nose. The unfortunate organ attained pantomimic dimensions within the few minutes that ensued subsequently to the delivery of the blow and previous to the falling of the curtain, and I have heard was favored by the gallery with a special call.

"Alas, Signor Carlo, I know not how to express my regret! . . . I was carried away . . ." faltered the Betisi, as with secret triumph and feigned remorse she looked upon the tenor's swollen nose.

Carlo gave her a passionate glance over it. As it had enlarged, so had his heart and his understanding; he saw his enemy beautiful, triumphant—a Queen of Song. He was conquered and her slave.

"Never mind my nose," he said generously. "I am beaten, fairly beaten, and with my own weapons. You are a clever woman, Signora, and a great singer. Permit me to take your hand."

"There," she said, and gave it. "And you, Signor, are a magnificent artist, though I have sometimes thought you a stupid man. What is it but stupidity—*Dio!*" she cried, "to be jealous of a woman of whom one is not even the lover or the husband?"

"Give me the right to be jealous," said Carlo the

tenor. "Make me one and the other! Marry me, Emilia. I adore you!"

An atmosphere of snuff and mildew enveloped them, as the Maestro, the date and design of whose evening dress-suit baffled the antiquarian and enraptured the caricaturist, embraced both the tenor and the soprano in rapid succession.

"Aha! *Mes enfants*, am I not a true prophet?" he cried. "*Hasten to grow up*, I said to the little one ten years ago, and *Carlo there shall one day sing Romeo to thy Juliet.*" He embraced them again. "You sing like angels—you quarrel like devils! Heaven intended you for one another. Be happy!" And the Maestro blessed the betrothed lovers with a sprinkling of snuff.

THE TUG OF WAR

MEN invariably termed her "a sweet woman." Women called her other things.

What was she like? Of middle height and "caressable," with a rounded, supple figure, exquisitely groomed and got up! Her golden hair would have been merely brown, if left to Nature. It came nearly to her eyebrows in the dearest little rings, and was coaxed into the loveliest of coils and waves and undulations. Her eyes were lustrous hazel, her eyelashes and eyebrows as nearly black as perfect taste allowed. Her cheeks were of an ivory pallor, sometimes relieved with a faint sea-shell bloom. Her features were beautifully cut, inclining to the aquiline in outline. Her voice was low and tender, especially when she was saying the sort of thing that puts a young fellow out of conceit with the girl he is engaged to, and makes the married man wonder why he threw himself away. Why he was such an infuriated ass, by George! as to beg and pray Clara to marry him ten years ago, and buy a new revolver when she said it was esteem she felt for him, not love. Why Fate should ordain just at this particular juncture that he should encounter the one woman, by jingo! the only woman in the world who had ever really understood and sympathized with him! It was Mrs. Osborne's vocation to make men of all grades, ranks, and ages ask this question. She had followed her chosen path in life with enthusiasm, let us say, collecting scalps, with here and there a little shudder of pity, and here and there a little smart of pain. Fascination, exercised almost in-

voluntarily, was to her, as to the cobra, the means of life. Not in a vulgar sense, because the late Colonel Osborne had left his widow handsomely provided for. But the excitement of the sport, the keen delight of capturing new victims—bringing the quarry boldly down in the open, or setting insidious snares, pitfalls, and traps for the silly prey to blunder into—these joys the huntress knows who sharpens her arrows and weaves her webs for Man.

I have said—or hinted—that other women did not love Mrs. Osborne. Knowing, as they did, that the lovely widow frankly despised them, her own sex responded by openly declaring war. They knew her strength, and never attacked her save in bands. Yet, strange to say, the invincible Mrs. Osborne was never so nearly worsted as in a single-handed combat to which she was challenged by a mere neophyte—"a chit"—as, had she lived in the eighteenth instead of the twentieth century, the fair widow would have termed Polly Overshott.

Polly's real name was Mariana, but, as everyone in the county said, Polly seemed more appropriate. Sir Giles Overshott had no other child, and sometimes seemed not to regret this limitation of his family circle. Lady Overshott had been dead some five years when the story opens, and Sir Giles was beginning to speak of himself as a widower, which to experienced ears means much.

The estate of Overshott Foxbrush was a fine one, unencumbered, and yielding a handsome rent-roll. It was understood that Polly would have nearly everything. She had consented in the most daughterly manner to become engaged to the eldest son of a county neighbor, a young gentleman with whom she was very much in love, Costebald Ianson Smithgill, commonly known as "Cis" Smithgill, his united initials forming the caressing little name. He was six feet high, and had a bass voice with

treble inflections, which he was training for a parliamentary career. He had, until the demise of an elder brother removed him from the service of his country, held a lieutenancy in the Guards. As to his family, who does not know that the Smithgills are a family of extreme antiquity, descended from that British Princess and daughter of Vortigern who drank the health of Hengist, proffering the Saxon General the mead-horn of welcome when he first set his conquering foot on British soil? Who does not know this, knows nothing. The mead-horn is said to be enclosed in the masonry of the eldest portion of Hengs Hall, the family seat in the country of Mixshire, where, of course, the scene of our story is laid. And Polly and Cis had been engaged about two months when Mrs. Osborne took The Sabines, and was called on by the county, because Osborne had been the cousin of an Earl, and she herself came of a very good family. You don't want any name *much* better than that of Weng. And Mrs. Osborne came of the Wengs of Hollowshire.

She took The Sabines for the sake of her health, which required country air. It was an old-fashioned, square Jacobean house of red brick faced with stone, and it boasted a yew walk, the yews whereof had been wrought by some long-moldered-away tree-clipper into arboreal representatives of the Rape of the Sabines. That avenue was one of the lions of the county, and every fresh tenant of the place had to bind him or herself, under fearful penalties, to keep the Sabine ladies and their abductors properly clipped.

Mrs. Osborne was destitute of the faculty of reverence, Lady Smithgill of Hengs said afterwards. Because early in June, when she drove over to call—it would not become even a Smithgill to ignore a Weng of Hollowshire—upon turning a curve in the avenue so as to command the house, the lawn, and the celebrated Yew Tree Walk,

the new tenant of The Sabines, exquisitely attired in a Paris gown and carrying a marvelous guipure sunshade, appeared to view; Sir Giles Overshott was with her, and the lady and the baronet were laughing heartily.

“Mrs. Osborne *simply shrieked*,” Lady Smithgill said afterwards, in confidence to a few dozen dear friends; “and Sir Giles was quite purple—that unpleasant shade, don’t you know?”

“It turned out that they were amusing themselves at the expense of The Sabines. I looked at her, and I fancy I showed my surprise at her want of taste.

“‘We think a great deal of them in the county,’ I said, ‘and Sir Giles can tell you how severe a censure would be pronounced by persons of taste upon the tenant who was so audacious as to deface or so careless as to neglect them, or even, ignorantly, to make sport of them.’

“At that Sir Charles became a deeper shade, almost violet, and she uncovered her eyes and smiled. I think somebody has told her she resembled Bernhardt in her youth.

“‘Dear Lady Smithgill,’ she said, or rather cooed (and those cooing voices are so irritating!), ‘depend on it, I shall make a *point* of keeping them in the most *perfect* condition. To be obliged to pay a forfeit to my landlord would be a nuisance, but to be censured by persons of taste residing in the county, that would be quite insupportable.’ Then she rang for tea, and there were eight varieties of little cakes, which must have been sent down from Buszard’s, and a cut-glass liqueur bottle of rum upon the tray. ‘Do you take rum?’ she had the audacity to ask me. I did not stoop to decline verbally, but shook my head slightly, and she gave me another of *those smiles* and passed on the rum. Sir Charles brought it me, and I waved it away, *speechless*, absolutely speechless, at the monstrosity of the idea.

“She overwhelmed me with apologies, of course.

“And both Sir Giles—who, I regret to see, is constantly there—and Sir Costebald, who has *once* called—consider her a sweet woman. But—think me foreboding if you will—I *cannot* feel that county Society has an acquisition in Mrs. Osborne.”

“Papa goes to The Sabines rather often,” said Polly Overshott, when it came to her turn to be the recipient of Lady Smithgill’s confidence. “He does say that Mrs. Osborne is a sweet woman, and he is helping her to choose some brougham horses. He says the pair she brought down are totally unfit for country roads. And as for the rum, she offered it to me. Colonel Osborne held a post in the Diplomatic Service at Berlin, and Germans drink it in tea, and I rather like it, though a second cup gives you a headache afterwards.”

“Mary!” screamed Miss Overshott’s mamma-in-law elect, who had effected this compromise between Polly and Mariana.

“As regards The Sabines,” Polly went on, “we have bowed down before them for years and years, and we shall go on doing it, but they are absurd all the same. So are our lead groups and garden temples at Overshott—awfully absurd——”

“I suppose you include our Saxon buttress and Roman pavement at Hengs in the catalogue of absurdities,” said Lady Smithgill icily. “Fortunately, Sir Costebald is not a widower, or they might stand in some danger of being swept away. At the present moment, let me tell you, Mary, your lead figures and garden temples are far from secure. That woman leads your father by the nose—twines him round her little finger. Cis tells me——”

“What does Cis know about it?” said Polly, flushing to the temples.

“Cis is a man of the world,” said Lady Smithgill. “But at the same time he is a dutiful son. He tells

everything to his mother. It seems—Cis personally vouches for the truth of this—that Sir Giles is constantly at The Sabines—in fact, every day. . . . He is dressed for conquest, it would appear.”

“Cis or Papa?” asked Polly, with feigned innocence.

“Sir Giles wears coats and neckties that would be condemned as showy if worn by a bridegroom,” said Lady Smithgill rapidly. “He is perfumed with expensive extracts, and his boots must be torture, Cis says, knowing all one does know of the Overshott tendency to gout. He never removes his eyes from Mrs. Osborne, laughs to idiocy at everything she says, and simply *lives* in the corner of the sofa next her. He monopolizes the conversation. Nobody else can get in a word, Cis tells me.”

“Since when did Cis begin to be jealous?” said Polly under her breath.

“I did not quite catch your remark,” returned Lady Smithgill. “By the way, Mary, I hope you will wear those pearls as often as you can. They require air, sunshine, and exercise. . . . I contracted my chronic rheumatic tendency thirty years ago through sitting in the garden with them on. For days together Sir Costebald’s mother used to *skip* in them upon the terrace, but I never went as far as that.”

“The pearls—what pearls?” asked Polly vaguely.

“Dear Mary, when a *fiancé* makes a gift of such beauty—to say nothing of its value—and the strings were originally purchased for two thousand pounds—it is customary for the recipient to exhibit a *little* appreciation,” Lady Smithgill returned.

“Appreciation!”

“Of course you thanked Cis, my dear. I never doubted that. But there, we will say no more. . . .”

Polly’s blue eyes flashed. She rose up; she had ridden over to the Hall alone, and her slight upright figure looked its best in a habit.

"I should like to say a little more." She put up her hand and unpinned her hat from her close braids of yellow-gold, and tossed the headgear into a neighboring chair. "Dear Lady Smithgill, Cis has not given me any pearls. Perhaps he has sent them to Bond Street to be cleaned——"

"Cleaned! They are in perfect condition."

"Or—or perhaps he has given them to some one else. I have seen very little of Cis lately," Polly ended. "But Papa tells me that he is a good deal at The Sabines. Papa seemed to find him as much in the way as . . . as Cis found Papa. And—her new kitchenmaid is the sister of our laundrywoman, and a report reached me that she had lately been wearing some magnificent pearls. . . . I thought nothing of it at the time, but now. . . ."

There was a snorting gasp from Lady Smithgill. All had been made clear. Her double chin trembled, and her eyes went wild.

"Mary!" she cried. . . . "I have been blind! My boy—my infatuated boy! That woman has a positively fiendish power over men. . . . She will enslave—ensnare Cis as she has done your father and dozens of others. Oh! my dear, there are stories. . . . She is relentless. The Sowersea's second son, De la Zouch Sowersea, is now driving a cab in Melbourne, and the Countess attributes everything to her. At Berlin—where her husband had a diplomatic appointment, and she learned to offer refined English-women rum in their tea—there were worse scandals—agitations, duels! Now my son is in peril. Save him, Mary! Do something before it is too late!"

"I can hardly drop in at The Sabines—say I have called for my property, and take Cis and Papa away," said Polly, her short upper lip quivering with pain and anger. "But I will think over what is best to be done. In the meantime do not worry Cis. Leave him to go his

way. We need not be too nervous. He and Papa will keep an eye upon each other," she ended.

"You know more of this than you have told me," poor Lady Smithgill gasped. "There are scandals in the air—people are talking—about my boy and that woman! Why did she ever come here?" the unhappy lady murmured. "I said from the first that she would be no acquisition to the county!"

Polly's cob, Kiss-me-Quick, came round, and Polly took leave. She had warm young blood in her veins, and an imperious temper of her own, and to be asked to "do something" to add a fresh access of caloric to the obviously cooling temperature of one's betrothed is not flattering. Yes, she had suspected before; yes, she had known more than she had told the proprietress of the agitated double chin and the agitated maternal feelings. Sir Giles had betrayed Cis as unconsciously as he had betrayed himself. "Really, Poll, I think you ought to keep the young man better to heel," he had said. "He means no harm, but Mrs. Osborne is a dangerously fascinating woman, and a woman of that type possesses advantages over a girl. And, of course, I don't suggest anything in the nature of disloyalty to yourself—Cis is the soul of honor and all that. But to see an engaged young fellow sitting on footstools, and lying on the grass at the feet of a pretty woman—who doesn't happen to be the *right one*—turning up his eyes at her like a dying duck in a thunderstorm—by George!—irritates me. He is always in Mrs. Osborne's pocket, and one never can get a word with her alone—I mean, nobody is allowed to usurp her attention for an instant. And here is the key to the Crackle-Room, since you are asking for it."

And Sir Giles handed his daughter the key in question, a slim, rusty implement belonging to the showroom of Overshott, an octagonal boudoir, periodically dusted and swept by the housekeeper's reverent hands,

but otherwise untouched, since Lady Barbara Overshott, the friend and correspondent of Pope and Addison, was found by her distracted husband sitting stone dead at her spinet before the newly-copied score of the "Ode on Saint Cecilia's Day," which had been sent her with the united compliments of the author and the composer. The furniture of the boudoir was of the reign of William and Mary, the walls panelled with pink lacquer beaded with ormolu, the shelves, brackets and cabinets laden with priceless specimens of crackle ware—the joy of the connoisseur and the envy of the collector.

"Thank you," said Polly, taking the key. "I was anxious to see for myself how many of Lady Bab's vases and bowls are left to us." She looked very tall and very fair, and rather terrifying as she confronted Sir Giles. They were in the hall of Overshott, the doors of which stood wide open to the faint September breeze and the hot September sunshine, and Sir Giles, who was going to luncheon at The Sabines, was putting on a thin dust-coat in preparation for the drive. He jumped at the reference to the crackle.

"I suppose Mrs. Brownlow has told you that I have removed a piece or two," he said, bungling with the sleeves of his dust-coat, for lack of the daughterly hitch at the back of the collar which would have induced the refractory garment to go on.

"Mrs. Brownlow has told me that a baker's dozen of bowls and vases and plaques and teapots—the cream of the collection, in fact," said Polly, "are adorning Mrs. Osborne's drawing-room."

"Confound it!" said Sir Giles, as he struggled with his garment. "The crockery isn't entailed; and if I desire to give a teapot to a friend I suppose I can do as I like with my own! And—I can't keep the cart waiting. Fanchon won't stand."

"Undoubtedly," said Polly, becoming cool as Sir Giles

grew warm. "Only—if you are going on giving teapots to friends, and there is a hamper of china at this moment under the seat of the cart—I think it would be advisable to change the name of the Crackle-Room. One might call it the 'Plundered Apartment,' or something equally appropriate."

"Call it what you choose, my dear." Sir Giles was now recovering from the shock of the unexpected onslaught. "I have said the crackle is no more entailed than Overton Foxshott or the Lowndes Square house—or anything else that at present I may call my own. If I were a younger man, I might plunder my mother and disappoint my promised wife for the pleasure of making a considerable present of jewelry to a woman ten years my senior. As it is——"

Sir Giles did not finish the speech, but strode angrily out and got into the cart, and gave Polly a short, gruff "Good-bye," as he drove away, leaving that puzzled young woman on the doorsteps.

"'Plunder my mother and disappoint my promised wife. . . . Present of jewelry . . . a woman ten years his senior.' . . . Can Cis have been giving jewels to Mrs. Osborne?" Polly wondered. The course of her love affair had run so smoothly that she was at a loss to account for the pain at her heart and the fever in her veins. Sir Giles's complaint she diagnosed correctly. He was jealous . . . jealous of Cis! He was angry with Polly. He had reminded her that he could do as he liked with his own, that the county might call her an heiress, but the county had no certain grounds for the assertion. Jealous and angry, the dear, cheery Dad. Because Cis chose to loll upon the grass at the skirts of a woman who was his senior by many more years than ten. Polly ordered round Kiss-me-Quick, and rode over to Hengs Hall, pondering these things in her mind. Much had been revealed to her, but it was for Lady Smithgill to lift the

last corner of the veil and disclose to Cis's future wife the true meaning of Sir Giles's reference to jewels.

"So Cis gave her the pearls, and Dad has given her the crackle to recover lost ground. Mrs. Osborne must be a clever woman," Polly reflected, as she rode slowly home through the sunset lanes on Kiss-me-Quick.

"How was it going to end, all this?"

"If Dad married Mrs. Osborne, it will be extremely unpleasant to possess a stepmother who has been made love to by one's husband. And should Mrs. Osborne succeed in marrying Cis——" Polly tightened the reins involuntarily, and Kiss-me-Quick quickened her paces. "Let her, if she wants him. No; let him if he wants her. But first—oh, first—there will be a Tug of War! I will not endure to be routed on my own ground by this designing charlatanism," thought Polly.

In London it might have happened—almost without remark. But here—here in the open—under familiar pitying, curious eyes. . . . Never, never, never! And with each repetition of the word Kiss-me-Quick danced at a cut of the whip. For Polly was humane, yet human.

The double report of a gun in one of the Heng coppices gave Kiss-me-Quick an excuse for more dancing, and presently, as Polly looked, shading her blue eyes with her half-gauntleted right hand, Ciss and a keeper came plainly into view. She pulled up Kiss-me-Quick and waited, as the young man, leaving his gun with the keeper, crossed the hot stubbles dangling a brace of birds.

"Why, Polly dear!" He tried to look natural and at ease as he lifted his leather cap from his crisp brown waves. "If you had told me you thought of riding over to see the mother, I'd have called for you and brought you over."

"It was a sudden idea, Cis," Polly said, as she gave him her gloved hand.

“Can you tie these birds on the saddle—or shall I send them over?” asked Cis, glad of an excuse that made it possible to fix his eyes below the level of hers. “They’re clean shot,” he added.

“Fasten them on—there’s a strap in the saddle pocket—and I will leave them at The Sabines as I pass!” said Polly cheerfully.

Cis’s jaw dropped: he turned pale under his sun tan. “Leave them at The Sabines!” he repeated blankly.

“I thought,” said Polly, bending a cool, amused glance upon her lover’s perturbed countenance, “that you meant them for Mamma. To be sure, she is not Mamma yet, but it is a pretty compliment to treat her as though she were already Papa’s wife—taking the pearls to show her before you brought them to me! I call it *quite sweet* of you!” Polly ended.

“I—I!” The young man’s face was an extraordinary study. “I am so glad you’re pleased,” he stammered.

“Dad is with her to-day,” went on Polly, stroking Kiss-me-Quick’s glossy neck with her whip-lash. “He took her over a cargo of crackle china out of Lady Bab’s room. China is a taste one begins to cultivate at her age, dear thing, and I suppose they are having a nice, quiet, cosy afternoon, arranging the pieces. She has her fads, Dad has his, and I am sure they will get on excellently together. Dear me! how warm you are! Come to tea to-morrow! Good-bye!”

And Polly rode quickly away. Sore as she was, angry and jealous as she was, she laughed as the vision of Cis’s hot, astonished, indignant face rose before her. She laughed again as she turned in at the bridle-gate of The Sabines. But she was grave and earnest as she dismounted at the hall-door and followed Ames, the butler, down the long, cool hall to the drawing-room.

“Miss Overshott.”

The announcement made Sir Giles attempt to get up from the footstool on which he was sitting, but he did not succeed at the first attempt, thanks to his rheumatism, and his daughter's eye lighted on him at once.

"Don't move, Dad, dearest. Why should you? Oh! Mrs. Osborne!" Polly flew to the fair widow, who advanced, cool, smiling, and exquisitely clad, to greet her visitor. "Oh, Mrs. Osborne, I am so—so glad!" Polly seemed choking with joyful tears as she caught the rounded waist of Melusine in her strong young embrace, and vigorously kissed the exquisitely powdered cheeks. "And I may call you Mamma—mayn't I?"

"Mamma?" echoed Sir Giles, sitting puzzled on the footstool.

"Mamma?" re-echoed Mrs. Osborne in cooing accents of surprise.

"You see, Dad has told me all," explained Polly, turning beaming, childlike eyes of happiness upon the embarrassed pair. "Though Cis knew before I did, and I hardly call that quite fair. But as he is to be your son, dear Mrs. Osborne—as I am to be your daughter—Why, there is the crackle arranged upon your cabinets already! How nice it looks! But it will all be yours, presently, won't it, Mamma?" Polly gave Mrs. Osborne another kiss, and then fluttered over to Sir Giles, who sat petrified upon the footstool, and gave him a couple. "You mustn't be jealous," she said, "you foolish old Dad! And now, Mamma darling, won't you give me some tea?"

"Dear Mary, with pleasure!" assented Mrs. Osborne, who knew that her hand had been forced, and yet could not help admiring the audacity of the *coup*. As her graceful form undulated to the tea-table, she cast a glance at Sir Giles, raising her beautifully tinted eyebrows almost to her golden-brown curls. She gave him credit for being a party to the plot, while he, poor astonished

gentleman, was as innocent as a new-born babe. In the passing out of a cup of tea she realized that a double game was no longer possible, and that Polly Overshott had the stronger hand. "Your father," she said, as she gave Polly her tea, "has enlisted a powerful advocate. All was not so settled as you seem to think, dear Mary, but——" And she sighed, and extended her white hand to Sir Giles, and helped him up from the footstool; and he was in the act of gracefully kissing that fair hand as Cis, in riding-dress, pale, agitated, and breathless from the gallop over, was ushered in.

"Cis!" cried Polly, realizing that the supreme moment of the Tug of War was now or never. Her eyes were blue fires, her cheeks red ones, as she moved swiftly and gracefully to her lover and led him forward. "Kiss Mamma and shake hands with Dad," she said, and added with a coquetry of which Cis had never thought her capable: "and then, perhaps, you may kiss me." Bewildered, choking with the reproaches, the recriminations with which he was bursting, and which it need hardly be explained were intended for Mrs. Osborne's private ear, the young man obeyed.

"I—I congratulate you both," he said thickly. Mrs. Osborne had never felt so little the niceties of a situation in her life. Nonplused, angry, and perturbed, she looked every hour of her age, despite pink curtains; and the powder only served to accentuate the suddenly revealed hollows in her face. Polly, as I have explained, had never worn such an air of coquetry, of brilliancy, of dare-devil, defiant mastery as she now displayed. But her final blow was to be dealt—and she dealt it.

"Mamma darling," she cooed, taking the vacated stool at Mrs. Osborne's feet—the stool contested for by both the discomfited wooers—"how cosy we are here—all together! Won't you please Dad—and me—and Cis—by bringing out the pearls!"

"The—pearls!" Mrs. Osborne said. An electric shock went through her; she turned stabbing eyes upon the speechless Cis. And Sir Giles, studying her face, made up his mind that he would never marry that woman—not if Polly did her level best to bring the match about.

While Polly prattled on.

"The pearls, of course. I told Cis I thought it sweet of him to bring them to show you—as though I were really your daughter, don't you know. And if you will fasten them round my neck yourself, I shall think it sweet of you. Where have you hidden them? Why, I believe you are wearing them now—to keep them warm for me—under your lace cravat, you dear, darling thing!"

The affectionate daughter-elect raised a guileless hand and twitched the jewels into sight.

Mrs. Osborne, ashy pale, and with Medea-like eyes, unfastened the jewels from her throat.

"Here they are, dear Mary. Take them—and may they bring you all the happiness I wish you!" said Mrs. Osborne in cooing accents.

Polly could not restrain a little shudder, but she was grave.

"Now Cis and I will go," she said, when the pearls were fastened round her neck over the neat white collar. "I am sure you and Dad want to be alone. Come, Cis dear."

And she kissed Mrs. Osborne again, and bore Cis—not unwilling, strangely fascinated by the new Polly so suddenly made manifest—away. They were riding slowly home to dinner at Overshott Foxbrush, when the sound of wheels rattling behind them, and Fanchon's well-known trot, brought a covert smile to Polly's lips.

Mrs. Osborne had a headache, Sir Giles explained, and so he had decided not to remain to dinner.

But father, daughter, and betrothed dined pleasantly

at Overshott Foxbrush. And when the dazzled Cis said good-night to the triumphant Polly, the valediction was uttered unwillingly with as many repetitions as there were pearls in the string Miss Overshott wore round her firm white throat.

There was no gas laid on at Overshott. Bedroom candlesticks were an unabolished institution. As Sir Giles gave his daughter hers, he spoke.

“You were a little premature in your conclusions, my girl, at The Sabines to-day. I won’t ask why you played that little comedy, because I know. . . . But you played it well . . . and I don’t think Cis will kick over the traces in that direction again. Nor do I think”—the Colonel cleared his throat rather awkwardly—“that you are going to have Mrs. Osborne for your second mother. She is too clever—and so are you! Good-night, my dear!”

GAS!

MRS. GUDRUN'S season at the Sceptre Theatre was drawing to a finish, and the funds of the Syndicate were in the same condition. Teddy Candelish—Teddy of the cherubic smile and the golden mustache, constantly described by the *Theatrical Piffer* as the most ubiquitous of acting-managers—sat in his sanctum before an American roll-top desk, checking off applications for free seats and filing unpaid bills. Gormleigh, the stage-director, balanced himself on the end of a saddlebag sofa, chewing an unlighted cigar; De Hanna, the representative of the Syndicate, was going over the books at a leather-covered table, his eyeglasses growing dim in the attempt to read anything beyond deficit in those neatly kept columns. Mrs. Gudrun occupied the easiest chair. Her feet, beautifully silk-stockinged and wonderfully shod, occupied the next comfortable; her silken draperies were everywhere, and a cigarette was between her finely cut lips. Her feather boa hung from an electric-globe branch, and her flowery diaphanous hat, bristling with diamond-headed pins, crowned the domelike brow of a plaster bust of the Bard of Avon.

“Well,” said the manageress, making smoke-rings and looking at De Hanna, “there’s no putting the bare fact to bed! We’ve not pulled off things as we had a right to expect. . . . We’ve lost our little pot, and come to the end of our resources, eh?”

“In plain terms,” said De Hanna, speaking through his nose, as he always did when upon the subject of money, “the Syndicate has run you for all the Syndi-

cate is worth, and when we pay salaries on Saturday we shall have"—he did some figuring with a lead pencil on the back of a millionaire's request for gratuitous stalls, and whistled sadly—"something like four hundred and fifty left to carry us through until the seventeenth."

"We began with as nice a little nest-egg as any management could wish for," said Candelish, dropping a smoking vesta into the waste-paper basket with fatalistic unconcern. "We thought *The Stone Age* would pay. I'd my doubts of a prehistoric drama in five acts and fourteen scenes that couldn't be produced under an outlay of four thousand pounds, but we were overruled." He veered the tail of his eye round at Mrs. Gudrun. "You and the Duke were mad about that piece."

"De Petoburgh saw great possibilities for me in it," said Mrs. Gudrun, throwing another cigarette-end at the fireplace and missing it. "That scene where Kaja comes in dressed in woad for battle, and brains What's-his-name with her prehistoric stone ax because he doesn't want to fight her, always thrilled him. He said I would be greater than Siddons in it, and, well—you remember the notices I got in the *Morning Whooper*. Cluffer did me justice *then*, if he did turn nasty afterward—the beast!"

"When I met Cluffer in the vestibule on the first night after the third act," said Teddy Candelish, "he said he was going home because the tension of your acting was positively too great to bear. He preferred me to describe the rest of the play to him, and jotted the chief points on his cuff before he went. And I grant you the notice was a ripper, but it didn't seem to bring people in; and after playing to paper for three weeks, we had to put up the fortnight's notice and jam *The Kiss of Clytie* into rehearsal."

"Dad vos a lofely—ach!—a lofely blay!" moaned Oscar Gormleigh, casting up his little pig's eyes to the

highly ornamental ceiling of the managerial sanctum. "Brigged from de Chairman in de pekinning, as I told you, as all de goot blays are."

"I wish the Germans had stuck to it, I'm sure," said De Hanna. "It always appeared to me too much over the heads of ordinary intelligent playgoers to pay worth a little damn."

"De dranscendental element——" Gormleigh was beginning, when Mrs. Gudrun cut him short.

"I never cared for it very much myself; but Bob Bolsover was dead set upon my giving the public my reading of *Clytie*—and, well, you must recollect the effect I created in that studio scene. Mullekens came round afterward, and brought his critic with him, and said that the best French school of acting must now look to its laurels, and a lot more. Mullekens is the proprietor of the *Daily Tomahawk*, and so, of course, I thought we were in for a good thing. How could I imagine that the creature of a critic would go home and make game of the whole show? Doesn't Mullekens pay him?"

"Ah, ja! Poot dat gritic's wife is de sister of de Chairman agtress dat blayed *Glytie* in de orichinal Chairman broduction," put in Gormleigh, whose real surname was Gameltzch, as everybody does not know. "Did I not varn you? It vas a gase of veels vidin veels."

"Wheels or no wheels, *Clytie* kissed us out of three thou. odd," said De Hanna, wearily scratching his ear with his "Geyser" pen, "and then we cut our throats with——"

"With him," put in Candelish, jerking a contemptuous thumb at the hat-crowned effigy of the Bard of Avon.

"You were keen on my giving the great mass of playgoers a chance of seeing my Juliet," remarked Mrs. Gudrun casting a Parthian glance at the worm that had turned.

“But they didn’t take the chance,” put in De Hanna, “and consequently—we fizzle out.”

“Like a burst bladder . . .” moaned Candelish, who saw before him a weary waste of months unenlivened by paid occupation.

“Or a damp sguib,” put in Gormleigh.

“Let’s have a sputter before we expire,” said De Hanna, with a momentary revival of energy. “Lots of manuscripts have been sent in. . . . Isn’t there a little domestic drama of the purely popular sort, or a farce imbecile enough to pay for production, to be found among ’em?”

“Dunno,” yawled Candelish, tilting his chair.

“Who is supposed to read the plays that are sent in?” asked De Hanna, turning his large Oriental eyes toward Mrs. Gudrun.

“I read some,” said the lady languidly, “and the dogs get the rest.”

She stretched, and an overpowering combination of fashionable perfumes, shaken from her draperies, filled the apartment. The three men sneezed simultaneously. Mrs. Gudrun rose with majesty, and going to the mantel-glass, patted her transformation fringe into form, and smiled at the perennially beautiful image that smiled and patted back. Suddenly there was a whining and scratching outside the door.

“It’s Billy. Let him in, one of you,” ordered the manageress.

All three men obeyed, clashing their heads together smartly at the portal. De Hanna, with watering eyes, opened the door, and a brindled bull of surpassing ugliness trotted into the office, carrying a chewed brown paper parcel decorated with futile red seals and trailing loops of string. Lying down in the center of the carpet and carefully arranging the parcel between his forepaws, Billy proceeded to worry it.

"Vot has de beast kott dere?" asked Gormleigh.

"Take it from him and see!" said Mrs. Gudrun carelessly. Gormleigh's violet nose became pale lavender as Billy, looking up from the work of destruction, emitted a loud growl.

"He understands everyding vot you say!" spluttered the stage-manager.

"Try him with German," advised De Hanna.

"Or mit Yiddish," retorted Gormleigh spitefully.

As De Hanna winced under the retort, Candelish, who had rummaged unnoticed in a drawer for some moments, produced a biscuit. Billy, watching out of the corner of his eye, pricked a ragged ear and whacked the carpet with his muscular tail.

"Hee, boy, hee, Billy!" Candelish said seductively. Billy rose upon his powerful bow-legs and hung out his tongue expectantly.

"Koot old Pillee!" uttered Gormleigh encouragingly. "Gleffer old poy!"

Billy vouchsafed the stage-manager not a glance; his bloodshot eyes were glued upon the biscuit as he stood over the brown paper parcel. Then, as Candelish, throwing an expression of eager voracity into his countenance, made believe to eat the coveted delicacy himself, Billy made a step forwards. . . . The end of the parcel projected from between his hind-legs. . . . De Hanna softly stepped to the fireplace and seized the tongs. . . .

"Poo' boy—poo' ol' Billy, then!" coaxed the acting-manager. He broke the biscuit with one inviting snap, Billy forgot the parcel, and De Hanna grabbed and got it. The next moment the bull, realizing his loss, pinned the representative of the Syndicate by the leg.

"Dash—dash—dash! Take the dash brute off, somebody!" shrieked De Hanna.

There was a brief scene of confusion. Then, as Billy retired under a corner table with a mouthful of ravished

tweed, "He's torn a piece out of your trow-trows, old man," Candelish remarked sympathetically.

"He might have torn all the veins out of my leg!" De Hanna gasped.

"Den," said Gormleigh, chuckling, "you would haf been Kosher."

But Mrs. Gudrun was deeply disappointed in Billy. "Letting you off for a bit of cloth!" she said. "Why, the breed are famous for their bite. He ought to have taken a piece of flesh clean out—I shall never believe in that dog again!" She swept over to Gormleigh, who was busy disentangling the lengths of chewed string and removing the tatters of brown paper from Billy's treasure-trove. It proved to be a green-covered, rather bulky volume of typescript. A red-bordered label gummed on the cover announced its title:

"MAGGS AT MARGATE

A SEASIDE FARCE,

IN THREE WHIFFS OF OZONE."

"What funny fool has written this?" snorted the manageress.

"De name of de author. . . . Ach so! De name of de author is Slump—Ferdinand Slump."

"I know the chap, or of him. He's a business man who owns a half share in some chemical gasworks at Hackney, and does comic literature in off hours. He writes the weekly theatrical page of *Tickles*," said De Hanna, "and——"

"*Dickles* is a stupid halfpenny brint," said Gormleigh, "dat sdeals all its chokes from de Chairman babbers."

"Really? It struck me that there must be some existing reason," said Candelish, "for the wonderfully

level flow of dullness the publication manages to maintain——”

“Well, I suppose somebody is going to read this farce, since that is what he calls it, by this Slump, since that is what he calls himself,” said Mrs. Gudrun, removing her hat from Shakespeare and pinning it on.

“Certainly. De Hanna, as the Representative of the Syndicate——” began Candelish eagerly.

“Pardon me. As acting-manager,” objected De Hanna, “you, Candelish, have the prior claim.”

“Didn’t you say you were going out of town to-night, Gormleigh?” interrupted Mrs. Gudrun, who had stuck in all her hatpins, and was now putting on her gloves.

“Choost for a liddle plow,” admitted Gormleigh. “Dere is a cheab night drain to Stinkton-on-Sea, sdarding from de Creat Northern at dwelve dirty. I shall sleep in de gorridor gombardmend, oond breakfast at a goffee and vinkle stall on de peach to-morrow morgen. By vich I haf poot von night to pay for at de hotel.” His bearded lips parted in a childlike smile of delight. “My wife goes not vid me,” he said, and smiled again.

“Then take this!” said Mrs. Gudrun, turning Slump’s farce over. “Report on it after the show on Monday.” And she rustled from the office on billows of silk, attended by clouds of perfume, the despised Billy, and the assiduous Candelish. The stage-manager swore. De Hanna, concealing the solution in the continuity of his tweeds with a bicycle trouser-clip, grinned.

“A little solid reading will steady you down, Gummy, and if my experience of Slump goes for anything—you’ve got it there. But you’ll report on Monday, as Her Nibs ordered. If you’ve not read it, look out for squalls on Monday night!”

* * * * *

“Potstausend! Hof I read dot farce!” gasped Gormleigh on the night of Monday. “Schwerlich! I hof read

him twice. Once from de beginning to de end, oond akain from de end to de beginning." His face assumed an expression of anguish, and the veins on his bald forehead stood out as the thick drops gathered there. "I cannot make heads or dails of him. . . . He is gram-jam with chokes, poot I cannot lof at dem; his situations are sgreaming, poot I cannot sgream. De tears day komm instead. . . . Dat vork is vonderful. . . it should one day be broduced, poot in de kreat National School Theatre for authors oond actors dot de gountry hos not yet founded, to brove to bubils vot is not a farce——"

"Yet I shouldn't be surprised if we did the piece here," said Teddy Candelish. "Slump, the author, has been talking over Her Nibs, and as he would let *Maggs at Margate* go for nothing down, find three hundred pounds toward the production, and merely take a nominal sixty per cent., the chances are that you'll be rehearsing before Tuesday. Hullo!" for the stage-manager had reeled heavily against him.

"Ich bin unwohl. . . . It is dose undichested chokes of Slumps I haf hodd on my gonstitution since I read dot farce. Oond now you komm mit anodder," Gormleigh groaned.

"Here's Her Nibs with Slump," said Candelish, with a grin; and Mrs. Gudrun, in the Renaissance robes of Juliet, swept into the green room with a little grinning, long-haired man in an imitation astrachan-collared overcoat over crumpled evening dress—a little man who gave a large hand, with mourning nails, familiarly to Candelish, and nodded cavalierly when Gormleigh was introduced. Slump was to read his play to the manageress and her staff after the performance that night.

Read his play Slump did, and Cimmerian gloom gathered upon the countenances of his listeners as the first act dragged to a close. Slump put the typescript down

on the supper-table and looked round; Gormleigh's head had sunk upon his folded arms. Heavy snores testified to the depth and genuineness of his slumbers. The countenances of De Hanna and Candelish expressed the most profound dejection, while the intellectual half of Mrs. Gudrun's celebrated countenance had temporarily vanished behind her upper lip.

"What do you say to that?" Slump asked, quite undismayed by these signs of weariness on the part of his listeners. Mrs. Gudrun came back to answer him.

"I say that it's the longest funeral I've ever been at. Open another bottle of the Boy, Teddy, and wake up, Gormleigh."

"I hof not been asleep," explained Gormleigh.

"I wish I had," sighed De Hanna. "The fact is," he continued, prompted by a glance from Mrs. Gudrun, "that your play don't do."

Slump maintained, in the face of this discouragement, a smiling front.

"Won't do, eh?"

"Won't do for nuts," said De Hanna firmly. "Nobody could possibly laugh at it," he continued.

"It is too tam tismal," put in Gormleigh.

"But if I prove to you that people can laugh at it, what then?" queried the undismayed Slump. He took from a fob pocket-book a newspaper cutting and handed it across the supper-table to De Hanna. The cutting was headed

"OZONE AT THE BALL,"

and ran thus:

"Will you take a little refreshment?"

"Thank you, I have just had a sniff of ozone."

"Question and answer at the ball given last night in aid of the — Hospital, — Square, at the Royal

Rooms, Kensington. For, besides champagne, ozone was laid on. After every dance Dr. Blank, head of the Hospital, wheeled about the hall an appliance in which, by electrical action, pure oxygen was converted into the invigorating element of mountain or seaside air, greatly to the purifying and enlivening of the atmosphere of the ballroom."

"My firm supplies the gas used in the treatment of the patients at that hospital," said Slump. "It's a turnover of ten thousand per annum. We're ready to lay it on at the theater, and give the playgoers genuine ozone with their evening's entertainment. As for the farce, I don't count it A1 quality, but I've made up my mind to be acted and laughed at, and I'm going to bring chemistry in to help me. Think what an advertisement for the hoardings: 'Real Ozone Wafted Over the Footlights,' 'Sea Air in the Stalls and Gallery!'"

"By thunder! it's a whacking notion!" cried Candelish.

"Colossal!" exclaimed De Hanna, taking fire at last.

"Poot vill de beoble loff?" asked Gormleigh.

"Ah, yes! Will they stand your farce even with an ozone accompaniment?" doubted Mrs. Gudrun.

"I've a machine downstairs in the stage-door office," said Slump calmly. "Will you try the first act over again—with gas?"

Gormleigh groaned, but the other three nodded acquiescence; and the men in charge of the electrical oxygen-generator received instructions to bring the machine upstairs.

* * * * *

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Ach, it is too funny for anydings!" This from Gormleigh, rocking in his chair, and mopping his stream-

ing eyes with a red silk handkerchief. "Ach, ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Gudrun held up her jeweled hands for mercy. The laughing man who worked the machine stopped pumping, the laughing author ceased to read, Billy the bulldog, who had been grinning from ear to ear, wiped a wet nose on his mistress's gown and sat down panting.

"How the deuce," gasped De Hanna, "can oxygen make a stupid farce a funny one? I can't understand it, for the life of me."

"Because," replied Slump, with brevity and clearness, "that's my trade secret, and I don't mean to give it away. Well, does *Maggs* go on, or do I take it to another management?"

The general assent was flattering in its unanimity. *Maggs at Margate* went into rehearsal at the "Sceptre" next day, and in a week was presented to the public. We refer you to the critiques published in the *Daily Tomahawk*, the *Yelper*, and other morning prints:

"It seems as though the good old days were come again. . . . Peals of irresistible laughter rang through the crowded theater as the side-splitting story of *Maggs* was unfolded. The audience laughed, the orchestra laughed, the actors themselves were infected by the general merriment."

"Mr. Slump is a public benefactor. When 'down,' a dose of him will be found to act like magic. The management's happy notion of supplying the theater with real ozone adds not a little to the pleasure of the entertainment."

And so forth, and so forth. Booking was immense; the box-office and libraries were besieged with applicants eager to breathe the genuine sea air wafted over the footlights at the "Sceptre." The treasury boxes had to be

carried to the office at night by two of the strongest commissionaires.

“Slump has a soft snap,” said De Hanna, chewing his Geyser pen rapturously as he went over the books. “Sixty per cent. of the gross receipts in author’s fees, and we’re averaging two thousand a week since we went in for daily *matinées*. Then the Transatlantic Trust is running the play in New York to phenomenal business; and we’ve planted it out for the Colonies, while France and Germany——”

“Id vas from Chairmany dat de leading itea of de blay was orichinally sdolen,” said Gormleigh, who had blossomed out in new clothes, a red necktie, and a cat’s-eye pin.

“Leading idea of the play is the Ozone,” said De Hanna; “and as Slump’s firm holds the patent for the electro-oxygen generator, and manufactures the oxygen used in the theater——”

“Dey call it bure oxygen, poot it is not dat,” said Gormleigh, laying his finger to his nose. “It is a motch cheaber gombound, I give you my vort.”

“What?” De Hanna came closer, and his Oriental eyes gleamed. “If that’s true, and we could manufacture and generate it for ourselves, we—we could buy up every rotten play we come across—there’s heaps of them to be had, Heaven knows—and run ’em for nuts. What is the stuff?”

“It is nitrous oxide,” said Gormleigh, “gommonly known as loffing kass—and I hof a friend, a Chairman chemist—dat vill—— Hoosh!” He laid his finger to his nose with an air of secrecy as Mrs. Gudrun swept into the office, enveloped in her usual clouds of silk and perfume. Candelish was not with her, but Slump and Billy followed at her heels.

“Of course, it must be admitted, *Maggs* is a phenomenal success,” she was saying, “and we’re making money

hand over hand; but the part of 'Angelina'—though Cluffer says no French comedy actress of any age or period could act it as I do—does not give me proper opportunities. Mr. Slump thinks with me." She smiled dazzlingly upon the enamored little man. "And he has written a tragedy in blank verse—*The Poisoned Smile*—which we mean to produce as soon as the run is over." She swept out again with her following, and De Hanna and Gormleigh exchanged a wink of partnership.

"A tragedy in blank verse by Slump. . . . Phew!" De Hanna whistled. "They won't want laughing-gas for that. . . . As for us, we go snacks in biz. I'll find the Syndicate and the theater."

"Oond I de blays, de sdage-management, oond de kass. De Chairman chemist friend I dold you of, I hof with him already a gontract made."

"Perhaps it is a bit shady," said De Hanna punctiliously, "to exploit an idea that really is Slump's property. . . ."

"De chokes in Slump's comic baber he sdole from a Chairman orichinal," said Gormleigh pachydermatously. "It is nodding poot tid for tad!"

AIR

“Sweet are the uses of advertisement.”

The Professional Shakespeare.

“I BELIEVE in the value of an ad.,” said Mrs. Gudrun one night at the Paris Grand Opera, the Sceptre Theatre, London, being temporarily closed pending a new production. “Sarah believes in it, too—and that’s another of the remarkable points of resemblance between us. And for the sake of a puff, I’m willing to do all that a woman can.”

“Can’t do more,” said De Petoburgh, shaking his head owlshly. “Can’t possibly do more.”

“Shut up, De Peto. That woman’s ready to bite you for talking through her big *aria*,” commanded Mrs. Gudrun, with a slight glance of imperial indifference towards the infuriated *prima donna*. She dropped her opera-glasses into the orchestra with a crash, narrowly shaving the kettle-drums, and causing the cymbal-player to miss his cue, as she continued: “But, though I’m generally keen to see the pay-end of a big notion, this idea of Bobby Bolsover’s won’t do for macaroons. Not that I’m lacking in what the Americans call horse-grit—wasn’t I on De Brin’s automobile when he won the Paris-Rouen race with his Gohard Cup Defender in nineteen-three? That was one hairbreadth escape, from the revolver shot that started us—you remember Bobby put in ball cartridge by mistake—to the three flying kilometers at the finish, which we did on one wheel, as the brakes refused to act. And I’ve hung by one coupling over a raging

American river in my own drawing-room Pullman saloon. But when it comes to dangling in a little basket that weighs next to nothing from a bag of gas that weighs nothing at all—I'm not taking any, and I don't care who knows it. A captive balloon's another thing. You're cabled and sand-bagged and what not, and, unless you jump out, nothing can happen to you. But—Do see who's knocking at the door!"

It was a uniformed and epauletted functionary conveying the polite intimation of the management that Madame and her party must positively maintain silence during the performance, or make themselves the trouble to depart!

"Tell him we'd had enough and were just going!" commanded Mrs. Gudrun. She rose, and, followed by the Duke, Bobby Bolsover, and Teddy Candelish—most active and ubiquitous of business managers, sailed out of the box, knocking over a fauteuil and carrying a footstool away upon the surging billows of her train. "Calls herself an artist!" she said, in reference to the *prima donna*, upon whose trills and roulades an enraptured audience hung breathless and enthralled; "and lets herself be put about by a little thing like that! Where's her artistic absorption, I should like to know. Why, I've studied Juliet in the drawing-room where Bobby and De Petoburgh were having a rat-hunt under the tables and things, and what difference did it make to my conception of the part? Not a sou. And *she* was a shrimp-seller at Nice! They all have that *voce squillante* and those thick flat ankles and those rolling black eyes like treacle-balls. Let's go and have some supper at the Café Paris."

Over American grilled lobster and quails *Georges Sand*, Bobby Bolsover's grand notion for an advertisement, cropped up again. One may explain that it consisted in the suggestion that Mrs. Gudrun and party

should electrify Paris, and subsequently London, by traveling *per* motor-airship from St. Cloud, rounding the Eiffel Tower in emulation of the immortal Santos, and returning to the Highfliers' Club airship station at the Parc upon the conclusion of the feat. A friend of De Petoburgh's, a distinguished member of the Highfliers' Club, would undertake to lend the airship—a newly completed vessel, with basket accommodation for three. This philanthropist did not propose to share the notoriety by joining the trip, and it was to be distinctly understood that De Petoburgh was to be responsible for any expenses involved.

And Bobby Bolsover, brimming, as usual, with genuine British bravery and brandy-and-soda, was ready to assume command.

"You know the principle of a motor?" Bobby demanded, as the supper proceeded, and a collection of champagne corks, gradually amassed on the corner of the table, assumed proportions favorable to purposes of demonstration.

"Candelish knows the principle of a motor," said De Petoburgh. "Never could learn myself. Too much borror!"

"One may say that there is gasoline in a receptacle," began Teddy. "Air passing through becomes charged with gas, and comes out ready to explode. Then——"

"To explode," agreed De Petoburgh; "absorutely correc' dennifashion, by Ringo!"

"Don't mind De Peto: he's in for one of his old attacks," said Mrs. Gudrun. "His legs have been all over the place since breakfast. Well?"

"You give a twirl to a crank," said Bobby Bolsover.

"Down goes the piston," continued Teddy.

"Down go her pistol," nodded De Petoburgh.

"And the dashed thing begins working automatically," exclaimed Bobby Bolsover. De Petoburgh balked

at the six-syllabled hedge. "Now, an airship is an example of——"

"The effectiveness of an aërial propeller driven by a petrol motor," put in Teddy.

"Jusso," said De Petoburgh. "Jusso."

"There is, practically speaking, no danger whatever," pursued Bobby Bolsover, warming to the subject, "that does not attend other popular pursuits. You may be thrown from a horse, or tumble off a coach-box——"

"Did once," said De Petoburgh, smiling in sad retrospection.

"Or you may blow up in a motor," went on Bobby.

"But in either case," said Mrs. Gudrun, with point, "one is on the ground, not hanging between heaven and earth, like What's-his-name's coffin."

"Brarro!" exclaimed De Petoburgh. "Encore! *Bis!*"

"Permit me to put in, dear lady," said Teddy Candelish, with his best professional manner, "that if you fall out of an airship, you eventually finish on the ground!"

"Under," gloomily interpolated De Petoburgh. "Under."

"And, further," said Bobby Bolsover, "the guide-rope is in connection with the ground all the time. Seventy feet of it, trailing like——"

"Snakes!" said the irrepressible De Petoburgh, with a glassy stare.

"And," went on Bobby, "we will have four picked men from the Highfliers' Club Grounds to run beside the guide-rope all the way and back."

"Thus combining personal advertisement," said Teddy Candelish, "with physical integrity."

Mrs. Gudrun permitted her classical features to soften. "Now you're talking!" the lady said. She smiled through the bottom of her champagne-glass as Teddy bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment, and

the trip was arranged forthwith. Thanks to the discretion of Teddy Candelish, the preparations were kept so profoundly secret that all Paris was on the alert when the eventful morning dawned. The Highfliers' Club Grounds were literally besieged, and the intending sky-navigators fought their way to the aërodrome containing their vessel through a surging throng of scientists, editors, journalists, dandies, actresses, photographers, pick-pockets, and politicians.

"Regular scrimmage—what?" panted Bobby Bolsover, as, bare-headed and disheveled, he reached the private side-door of the balloon-house.

"We ought to have slept here," said Mrs. Gudrun, straightening her hat-brim as the breathless men collected her hairpins.

"Nothing but perches to sleep on," objected Bobby Bolsover, indicating the skeleton arrangements of the vast interior.

Mrs. Gudrun, whose eye soared with Bobby's, would have changed color had the feat been possible.

"Do we really climb up that awful ladder to get on board?" she inquired. "I have more nerve than any woman I know; but I wasn't educated as an acrobat. *J'en suis tout baba*, Bobby, that you should have let us all in for a thing like this. We're planted, however, and must go through. What crowds of smart women! What on earth has brought *them* out so early in the morning? It must have got about that I'm going to be killed!" She gulped and clutched Teddy. "I c-can't go on in this scene! Make an apology—make an apology and say I'm ill. I *am* ill—horribly!"

"I feel far from frisky," said Bobby Bolsover candidly. "Gout all last night in the head and eyes, and—every limb, in fact, that one relies upon in steering a motor. But, of course, I am ready to undertake the helm—unless anybody else would like to volunteer?"

He looked at Teddy, whose eye was clear, whose cheek was blooming, whose golden curls encroached upon a forehead unlined with the furrows of personal apprehension.

“W-what do you say, Teddy?” gasped Mrs. Gudrun.

“I deeply regret. . . . It is imperatively necessary, dear lady,” said Teddy glibly, “that in your absolute interests I should be at the ‘Fritz’ at twelve. The Paris representatives of the *Daily Yelper*, the *Morning Whooper*, and the *Greenroom Rag*, have appointed that hour to receive particulars of your start; three Berlin correspondents, one from Nice, and the editors of the *Journal Rigolo* and the *Vie Patachon* are to hole in ten minutes later; and there will be thousands of telegrams to open and answer. You know that the Syndicate of the Escorial Palace of Varieties have actually tendered to secure the turn. Therefore, though my heart will make the voyage in your company, I—cannot.”

Blue-eyed Teddy melted into thin air. Mrs. Gudrun, looking older than a professional beauty has any right to look, surveyed her companions with a hollow gaze of despair, while outside the aërodrome Paris roared and waited. Bobby, as green as jade, in a complete suit of motor armor, goggles included, leaned limply against the ladder that led upwards to the platform of the aërodrome. De Petoburgh, in foul-weather yachting kit, his glass fixed in his bloodshot left eye by the little mechanical contrivance that keeps it from tumbling, looked back. That debilitated nobleman, though shaky, was game to the backbone.

“I can’t drive a motor, Bolsover,” he said quite distinctly, “but I can drive *you*. Will you—oblige me—by climbing up that ladder? We follow. After you, dear lady!”

And the three negotiated the giddy ascent. Upon the platform they found the owner of the airship and the

four workmen who, under promise of reward and threat of punishment, were to attend the guide-rope. The air-ship itself, a vast sausage-shaped silk bag of hydrogen, from which depended by rubber-sheathed piano wires a framework of proven bamboo supporting three baskets—one forward, one amidships, and one aft—hovered over the heads of the three depressed adventurers like a shapeless embodiment of adverse Fate. And Paris was growing impatient.

“Tell ’em to stick to the guide-rope, De Croqueville, for their lives,” urged Bobby feverishly, squeezing the hands of the owner of the machine. “Give it ’em in their own lingo; my French isn’t fluent to-day. They’re not to trust to my steering, but just tow us to the Tower and back.”

De Croqueville squeezed back, and embraced Bobby on both cheeks. “My brave, my very dear, rely upon me. Madame”—he kissed the jeweled knuckles of Mrs. Gudrun—“all Paris is assembled to behold the most beautiful woman prove herself also to be of the most brave. M. le Duc,” he saluted De Petoburgh distantly, and then cordially shook hands, “I am as kin a sportsman as how you. I have plank my egg—my oof—a thousand francs you circulate the Tour Eiffel, in spite of the wind, which blows from the wrong quarter. Adieu!”

“Blows from the wrong quarter!” gasped Bobby Bolsover. The eyeglass of De Petoburgh turned in his direction, and he immediately climbed the forward ladder and got into the steersman’s creaking basket, and grasped the wheel with an awful sinking immediately below the heart. . . . The Duke helped Mrs. Gudrun to assume the central position, and got in astern. Just before the starting word was given and the great doors of the aërodrome rolled apart in their steel grooves, he leaned over to De Croqueville, addressing that gentleman in his own language:

“One supposes she”—he alluded to the vessel—“is—sea—I mean air-worthy—eh, my friend?”

De Croqueville shot up his eyebrows and spread his hands.

“One supposes. . . . Truly, dear friend, I know not! . . . The vessel is newly complete—this is what in English you call the try-trip. That is why I hedge my bet. One thousand francs you round the Tour Eiffel and return uninjure—two thousand you do not return uninjure—whether you round the Tour or no. *Adieu-dieu!*”

The electric signal rang. The colossal doors groaned apart. The four workmen scuttled down the ladders like frightened mice, seized the guide-rope, and towed the airship out of dock. Paris waved handkerchiefs, cheered. Bobby Bolsover, ghastly behind his goggles, pressed the pedal and manipulated the wheel. The engine throbbed, the tail-shaft screw revolved. The adventurers had started.

“Qui-quite nice,” gulped Mrs. Gudrun tremulously, as the keen wind toyed with her silk veil and fluttered her fur boa.

“She pitches,” said De Petoburgh briefly. “Keep her head to it, Bolsover.”

There was a sickening moment as the airship mounted obliquely upward. . . . Then a tug at the guide-rope brought her nose down, pointing to the sea of fluttering handkerchiefs beneath. Mrs. Gudrun groaned and clung to the sides of her padded basket. De Petoburgh swore.

“I can’t—manage her. My—my nerve has gone. Let’s put about and take her back to dock again,” gasped Bobby.

“For—for Heaven’s sake, do!” groaned Mrs. Gudrun. But again that new voice spake from the blue lips of De Petoburgh, and—

“I’ve lived like a dashed blackguard, but I’m not going to die like a cowardly cad. Curtain’s up—go through with the show. Bolsover, you bragging, white-livered idiot, you can steer an electric launch and drive a motor-car. If I’d ever learned to do either, I’d take your place. But as I can’t—go ahead, and keep on as I direct, or I’ll shoot you through your empty skull with this revolver”—the click of the weapon came stimulatingly to the ears of the scared helmsman—“and swear I went mad and wasn’t responsible. They—they’d believe me! Mabel, if you sit tight and go through with this, I’ll stand you that thousand-guinea tiara you liked at Alphonse’s, if we—when we get safe to ground. Now, Bolsover, drive on, or take the consequences!”

Perhaps the familiar terms employed restored Bobby to the use of his suspended faculties. Certain it is that the airship began to forge steadily ahead at the rate of some twenty miles an hour—but *not* absolutely in the direction of the vast spidery erection of metal which was its destined goal. It skimmed in the direction of the Bois de Boulogne, keeping at so lofty an altitude that of the end of the guide-rope merely a length of some six feet trailed upon the ground.

“Those—those men l-look so funny running after it,” said Mrs. Gudrun, upon whom the promise of the tiara had acted as a stimulant.

“I hope they may keep up with it,” muttered De Petoburgh as the airship sailed over the humming streets of the gay city, and tiny men and women turned white specks of faces upwards to stare. “Ease her, Bolsover,” he commanded.

“Oh, we’re going right up again!” gasped Mrs. Gudrun. Then, as the airship regained the horizontal: “This isn’t half bad,” she said in a more cheerful tone, “but the housetops with their spiky chimney-pots look dreadfully dangerous. The guide-rope has knocked a

row of potted geraniums off a third-floor balcony, and the old man who was reading the paper in the cane chair must be swearing awfully. But where are the men? I don't see them; do you?"

The four workmen were at that moment heatedly cursing the Municipal Council of Paris at the bottom of a very long, very deep trench which had been excavated across a certain street for the accommodation of a new drain. The guide-rope pursued its course without them, now sweeping a peaceful citizen off his legs, now covering the occupants of a smart victoria with mud, now trailing over a roof or coiling serpent-wise around the base of a block of chimneys. In the distance loomed the Eiffel Tower, but in answer to De Petoburgh's repeated requests that he should steer thither, Bobby Bolsover only groaned. And the airship, after navigating gracefully over the green ocean of the Bois de Boulogne, continued her trip over the Longchamps racecourse, veered to the south at the pleasure of a shifting current of air, and, having leaked much, began plainly to buckle and bend.

De Petoburgh, uncomfortably conscious of a misspent existence and wasted opportunities, looked at the back of Mrs. Gudrun's head, and wondered whether she knew any prayers.

"The trees are coming awfully close, aren't they?" said the unconscious beauty.

"Awfully!" said the Duke, as the capricious motor stopped.

Then Mrs. Gudrun screamed, and Bobby Bolsover, casting his goggles to the winds, huddled in the bottom of his basket, and the debilitated but plucky nobleman shut his eyes and thought of his long-dead mother as the airship hurtled downwards . . . crash into the top of the tallest of the giant oaks in the magnificent park of H.S.H. Prince Gogonof Babouine,

The Prince has the reputation of being excessively hospitable. When the three passengers recovered from the shaking, the top of a long ladder pierced the thick foliage beneath the wrecked vessel, and the Prince's major-domo, a stout personage in black with a gold chain, came climbing up with a courteous message from the Prince. Would Madame and M. le Duc and the other gentleman descend and partake of the second *dejeuner*, which was on the point of being served, or would they prefer to remain on board their vessel?

"Stop up here? Does the man take us for angels?" snorted Mrs. Gudrun indignantly.

The descent was not without danger, but with the aid of De Petoburgh and the major-domo, she braved and completed it without injury either to her long celebrated limbs or her famous features. Bobby followed.

The Prince entertained the shipwrecked castaways in princely fashion, and drove the party back to Paris on his drag, the wonderful yellow coach with the team of curly Orloffs. And he consented to dine; and that night Mrs. Gudrun held a reception behind the illuminated balconies of the Hotel Fritz, while the London newsboys were yelling her familiar name, and the evening papers containing the most ornamental particulars of her adventure went off like hot cakes.

According to the most reliable account garnered by our special correspondent from the lovely lips of the exquisite aëronaut, she had never quailed in the moment of peril, and, indeed, upon the distinguished authority of the Hon. R. Bolsover: "One is never frightened while one can rely upon one's own pluck!" Nobody interviewed De Petoburgh, leaning vacuously smiling against the wall. Indeed, he had developed another of his attacks, and could not have responded with any coherence.

"Wonderful fellow, Bolsover," Teddy Candelish

gushed, Teddy, all smile and sparkle, "so brainy and resourceful!"

"Rath' . . ." assented De Petoburgh fragmentarily.

"And Her Nibs—a heroine—positively a heroine!"

"Ra'!" assented De Petoburgh, as the heroine swept by, making magnificent eyes at the palpably enamored Prince, while Paris murmured indiscreet admiration.

"And you, Duke, eh? Found it trying to your nerves, they tell me?" Teddy continued, twirling his golden mustache. "Such trips too costly, eh, to indulge in often?"

"Ra'!" agreed De Petoburgh, with a glance at the thousand-guinea diamond fender surmounting the most frequently photographed features in the world.

SIDE!

UPON the conclusion of the phenomenally brief run of *The Poisoned Kiss* at the Sceptre Theatre, Mrs. Gudrun, who had sustained the heroic rôle of Aldapora "with abounding verve and true histrionic inwardness" (to cull a quotation from the enthusiastic notice which appeared in the *Theatrical Piffar*), and whose sculptur-esque temples throbbed no less with the weight of the dramatic laurels heaped upon them than with the heady quality of the champagne with which those laurels had been liberally drowned—Mrs. Gudrun left the author and the Syndicate, *per* their Business Representative, exchanging poignant personalities over a non-existent percentage, and hied her to the Gallic capital for recreation and repose; bearing in her train the leading man, Mr. Leo De Boo, a young actor who had chipped the egg of obscurity in the recent production. De Boo was "a splendid specimen of virile beauty," according to the *Greenroom Rag*—all shoulders, legs, nose, and curls, without any perceptible forehead; and Teddy Candelish, most ubiquitous of acting-managers, came within an appreciable distance of being epigrammatic when he termed him "a chronic cad in beautiful boots." For more exquisite foot-gloves than those De Boo sported were never seen, whoever made and gave credit for them; and De Boo was said to have a different pair for every day in the month and every imaginable change in the weather.

"Nearly threw up his part in *The Poisoned Kiss*," said Teddy afterwards, at the club, "when he discovered

that it was to be a sixteenth-century production; took me aside, and told me in confidence afterwards, that if he'd been allowed to play Hermango in gray suède tops with black pearl buttons and patent leather uppers, the piece would have been a colossal monetary, as well as artistic, success."

"Schwerlich! Who kann pretend to follow de workings of a mind like dot jung man's," said Oscar Gormleigh, "vidout de assistance of de migroscope? Und hof I not known a brima donna degline to go on for Siebel begause she hodd been kifen brown insdead of violet tights? It vas a tam gonsbiracy, she svore py all her kodd! In prawn legs she vould groak like von frog mit kvinsky—mit violet she always varble like de nachtigall. De choke of it vas"—the talented stage-director laid a hairy finger archly against his Teutonic nose—"dat voman always groak—not never varble—tights or no tights!"

"De Boo is a rank bounder," said Candelish decidedly.

"He has pounded from de ranks," pronounced Gormleigh, "und he vill go on pounding—each pound so motch higher dan de last von, oontil he drop splosh into de kutter akain. He who now oggupies a svell mansion-flat in Biccadilly, *ach ja!*—he vill end vere he bekan—in de liddle krubby sit-bedding-room over de shabby shop vere dey let out segond hond boogs on hire mit segond hond furnidure."

Mrs. Gudrun would have been deeply incensed had she heard this unlicensed expression of opinion from one whom she had always kept in his place as a paid underling. For six nights and a matinée she had, in the character of Aldapora, elected to poison herself in the most painful manner rather than incur the loss of De Boo's affections, and, with the "true histrionic inwardness" so belauded by the *Theatrical Piffer*, she had iden-

tified herself with the part. So she took a blazing comet flight to Paris with the actor in her train, and paragraphs announcing their arrival at the Hotel Spitz appeared in the London papers.

"Listen to this, Jane Ann," said the paternal De Boo, whose name was Boodie—and when I add that for twenty years the worthy father had been employed as one of the principal cutters at Toecaps and Heels, that celebrated firm of West-End bootmakers, it will be understood whence the son obtained his boots. "To think," Mr. Boodie continued, "that Alfred—our Alfred, who sp'iled every particle of leather he set his knife to, and couldn't stitch a welt or strap a seam to save his life—should ever have lived to be called a rising genius!"

"The ways of Providence are wonderful, father!" returned the said Alfred's mother dutifully. Mrs. Boodie was an experienced finisher herself, and had always lamented Alfred's lack of "turn" in the family direction. "An', if I was you, I wouldn't mention that bit in the paper to Aphasia Cutts. She's dreadful jealous over our Alfred, even now, though he hasn't bin to see 'er or wrote for two years. As good as a break off, I should a-regarded it, 'ad I bin in her place. But she's different to what I was."

"So are all the gals," said Mr. Boodie with conviction, bestowing upon his wife a salute flavored with Russia leather and calf.

"Well, I'm sure. Go along, father, do!" said Mrs. Boodie, with a delighted shove.

But of course Aphasia—so christened by an ambitious mother in defiance of the expostulations of a timid curate—had already seen and cried over the paragraph. She had loved Alfred and stood up for him when he was a plain, stupid boy with an unconquerable aversion to work. She had been his champion when he grew up, no longer plain, but as pronounced a loafer as ever. She

had given up, in exchange for his loutish affections, the love of an honest and hard-working man.

"I can't 'elp it!" she had said; "you can get on without me, and Alfred can't, pore chap. His Par calls 'im a waster—I believe 'e'd give 'im the strap if 'e wasn't six foot 'igh. But I've got 'im an opening in the theatrical line, through a friend of mine as does fancy braiding at Buskin's, the stage shoemaker's in Covent Garden. It's only to walk on as one of the Giant's boy-babies in the Drury Lane panto.—eighteen pence a night *and matinées*—but his Mar will be thankful. If only 'is legs are long enough for the part——"

They were, and from that hour Alfred had embarked on a career. When entrusted with a line to speak, it was Aphasia who held the grimy slip of paper on which it was written and aided the would-be actor with counsel and advice.

"And 'old up your 'ead, do, as if you was proud of yourself, and don't bend at the knees; and whether you remember your words or not, throw 'em out from your chest as if you was proud of 'em. An' move your arms from the shoulder like as if you was swimmin'—don't crook your elbers like a wooden doll. And throw a bit o' meanin' into your eye. You took me to see that Frenchman, Cocklin 'e calls 'imself; as played the chap with the boko 'e wouldn't let the other chaps make game of. . . . French or Japanese, they're both Dutch to me, but I watched Cocklin's eye, and I watched 'is 'ands, an' I could foller the story as if it was print, an' plainer. I've went to see an actor since what folks said was a great artis', and if 'e did talk English, 'is eye was as dumb as a boiled fresh 'addock's an' 's 'ands was like slices of skate. Now say your bit over again."

And Alfred said it, this time to the satisfaction of his instructress. When he got a real part Aphasia coached him, and rode down from Hammersmith with

him on the bus, and was waiting for him at the stage-door when he came out, the tears of joy undried on her pale cheeks. And that was the night upon which she first noticed a coldness in the manner of her betrothed.

“An’ now I’m not good enough for him to wipe his boots on,” she sobbed, sitting on her bed in the single room lodging off the roaring, clanging Broadway—“the boots ’is Par cut an’ welted, an’ ’is Mar stitched, an’ I finished. But I won’t stand in ’is light. I’ve my pride, if I am a boot-finisher. I’ll see that Mrs. What’s-her-name face to face, an’ ’ave it out as woman to woman, an’ tell ’er she’s welcome to marry ’im for me.”

And Aphasia dried her poor red eyes and took off Alfred’s betrothal ring—a fifteen-carat gold circlet with three real garnets, bought in the Broadway one blushful, blissful Saturday night—and evicted his photographs from their gorgeous cheap frames, and made a brown-paper parcel of these things, with a yellow leather purse with a blue enamel “A” on it, and tied it up with string.

Perhaps something of her fateful mood was telepathically conveyed to Mr. Leo De Boo at that moment, for he shivered as he sat at the feet of Mrs. Gudrun upon the balcony of a private suite at the Hotel Spitz, and turned up eyes that were large and lustrous at that imperishable image of Beauty, exhaling clouds of fashionable perfume and upborne on billows of chiffon and lace. Mrs. Gudrun, who naturally mistook the spasms of a genuine plebeian British conscience for the pangs of love, lent him her hand—dazzlingly white, astonishingly manicured, jeweled to the knuckles, and polished by the devout kisses of generations of worshipers—and De Boo mumbled it, and tried to be grateful and talk beautifully about his acting. But this bored Mrs. Gudrun, who preferred to talk about her own.

“I have often felt that myself,” she said—“the con-

viction that a crowded audience hung upon my lips and saw only with my eyes, and that I swayed them as with a magic thingumbob, by the power of a magnetic personality."

"It is a mystery," said De Boo, passing his long fingers through his clustering curls, "that once in a century or so a man should be born——"

"Or a woman. Marvelous!" agreed Mrs. Gudrun. "Marvelous! the man who runs the *Daily Tomahawk* said that when I made my first appearance on the stage."

"Genius is a crown of fire," said De Boo, who had read this somewhere. "It illuminates the world, yet scorches the wearer to the bone. He——"

"She suffers," said Mrs. Gudrun, neatly stopping the ball and playing it on her side. "You may bet she suffers. Hasn't she got the artistic temperament? The amount of worry mine has given me you would never believe. Cluffer, of the *Morning Whooper*, calls me a 'consolidated bundle of screaming nerves.' When I've sat down to dinner on the eve of a first night, De Petoburgh—you've met the Duke?—has had to hold me in my chair while Bobby Bolsover gave me champagne and Angostura out of the soup-ladle. And I believe I bit a piece out of that. And afterwards—ask 'em both if I wasn't fairly *esquinte*."

"But the possessor of an artistic temperament—such as mine—even though the fairy gift entails the keenest susceptibility to anguish," quickly continued De Boo, "enjoys unspeakable compensation in the revelation to him alone of a kingdom which others may not enter. Looking upon the high mountains in the blush of dawn, I have shouted aloud with glee——"

"The first time I ever went into a southern Italian orange-grove in full bloom," acquiesced Mrs. Gudrun, "the Prince of Kursaal Carle Monto, who was with me,

simply sat down flat. He said Titian ought to have been alive to paint my face and form against that background. . . . By the way, the first act of that new play, the title of which I've forgotten, and which I've leased from a scribbling idiot whose name don't signify, takes place in a blooming orange-grove. I've cast you for the leading man's part, Leo, and I hope you will be properly grateful for the chance, and conquer that nasty habit you have of standing leering at the audience in all my great moments."

"Dearest lady," De Boo argued glibly, "does it not increase the dramatic poignancy of such moments if the spectators are enabled to read in the varying expressions pictured on *my* face the feelings your art inspires?"

But Mrs. Gudrun was inexorable. "They can read 'em in the back of your head if they're anxious," said she, "or they can take the direct tip from me. I hope that's good enough. I don't see the cherry-bun of running a theater to be scored off by other people, and so you know! And now that's settled, let us go and have stuffed oysters and roast ices at Noel Peter's, and see Sarah afterwards in her new tragedy *rôle*. I'm the only woman she's really afraid of, you know, and I feel I'm bound to romp in in front of her before long. She says herself that acting like mine cannot be taught in a conservatoire, and that I constitute a complete school in myself. Have you ever seen me play Lady Teazle?"

"Unhappily I have not. It is a loss," said De Boo, "a distinct loss. By the way, when I scored so tremendously as Charles Surface at Mudderpool——"

"Hell is full of men who have scored as Charles Surface at Mudderpool," said Mrs. Gudrun crushingly. "That sounds like a quotation, doesn't it? Only it must be mine, because I never read. You're a charming

fellow, and a clever boy, Leo, but, as a friend, let me tell you that you talk too much about yourself. It's bad form; and the truly great are invariably the truly modest. I must save up that epigram for my next interview, I think. There's the auto-brougham."

And De Boo enfolded the renowned form of his manageress in a point lace and sable wrap, and they went off to Noel Peter's, and saw La Gr-r-ande perform.

Rehearsals of the new play, *Pride of Race*, at the Sceptre had scarcely commenced when in upon Teddy Candelish, laboriously smoking in his sanctum and opening the morning's mail, swept Mrs. Gudrun.

"I haven't a moment to breathe," she said imperially, accepting the chair Teddy acrobatically vacated. "Come in, De Petoburgh—come in, Bobby; you are in the way, but I'm used to it. No, De Petoburgh, that cellaret's tabooed; remember what Sir Henry said to you about liqueurs before lunch. Are there any letters of importance, Teddy, to my cheek?"

"Several bundles of press-cuttings from different firms, thirty or forty bills, a few tenders from photographers, and—and some love-letters," replied Candelish, pointing to some neat piles of correspondence arranged on the American roll-top desk. "Usual thing—declarations, proposals, and so forth."

"Always plenty of those—hey?" chuckled De Petoburgh, sucking a perfunctory peptoid lozenge in lieu of the stimulant denied.

"Plenty, b'Jove!" echoed Bobby Bolsover.

"Not so many as there used to be," responded Candelish with tactless truthfulness, rewarded by the lady with a magnificent glare. "By the way, there's one odd letter, from a girl or a woman who *isn't* quite a lady, asking for an interview on private business. Signs

herself by the rummiest name—Aphasia Cutts.” He presented the letter.

“Aphasia?” said Mrs. Gudrun, extending heavily jeweled fingers for the missive. “Isn’t that what De Peto-burgh has when he can only order drinks in one syllable and his legs take him where he doesn’t want to go? Eh, Bobby?”

“Yes; but remindin’ the Duke of that always brings on an attack,” said Bobby solicitously. “Look at him twitchin’ now. . . . Steady, Peto! Woa-a, old man-nums!”

“Take him for a tatta while I finish the rehearsal,” commanded Mrs. Gudrun, rising from Teddy’s chair in an upsurge of expensive draperies. “Write to this Aphasia girl, Teddy, and say I’ll see her to-morrow, between three and four p. m. After all, the whole-souled adoration of one’s own sex is worth having,” the lady said, as, heralded by the rustling of silken robes, the barbaric clash of jeweled ornaments, and wafts of fashionable perfume, she sailed back to the boards.

When Aphasia got her reply, p.p. Teddy, some hours later, there was very little of whole-souled adoration in her reception of the missive.

“I s’pose she looks on me as the dirt under her feet, like Alfred. But I won’t let that put me off makin’ the sacrifice that’s for his good—the ungrateful thing! I ’ope she’ll make ’im a nice wife, that’s all,” she sobbed, as she took from her collar-and-cuff drawer the flat brown-paper parcel containing the garnet ring, the photographs, and the letters. And she dressed herself in her best, with a large lace collar over a cloth jacket, and the once fashionable low-necked pneumonia-blouse, to which the girls of her class so fondly cling, and went to meet the lady whom, in terms borrowed from the latest penny romance, she called her “haughty rival.”

Mrs. Gudrun received her with excessive graciousness.

A costume rehearsal was in progress, and the lady was in the hands of her maids and dressers. "I suppose this is the first time you have ever been behind the scenes?" she inquired. "Look about you as much as you like, and then you will be able to say to your friends: 'I have been in Mrs. Gudrun's dressing-room.' You see, I am in the gown I wear in the first act. It is by Babin; and if you write for a ladies' paper, you will remember to say so, please."

"I don't write for any ladies' paper," said Aphasia. "I couldn't spell well enough—not if they ast me ever so. But it's a lovely gownd, and I suppose all that stuff on your face is what makes you look so young an' 'andsome—from a long way off."

Mrs. Gudrun's famous features assumed a look of cold displeasure. She assumed the majestic air that suited her so eminently well, and asked the young person's business.

"It's quite private, and I'll thank you to send away your maids, if you've no objection," said the dauntless Aphasia. "The fact is," she continued, when the indignant menials had been waved from the apartment, "as I've come to make you a present—a present of a young man——"

"Look here, my good young woman," began the incensed manageress.

Aphasia suddenly handed her the brown-paper parcel, and the wrath of Mrs. Gudrun was turned to trembling. She was sure this was an escaped lunatic. Aphasia profited by the lull in the storm to explain. She had come to hand over her Alfred—stock, goodwill, and fixtures. He had forgotten to be off with the old love before he went on with the new, but the old love bore no malice. All was now over.

"And you may marry 'im whenever you like," sobbed Aphasia.

"I never heard anything so indecent in the whole course of my life," said Mrs. Gudrun, rising in offended majesty. "Marry Mr. De Boo, indeed! If I had married every leading man I've played love-scenes with since I adopted this profession, I should be a female Brigham Young! 'In love with me!' Perhaps he is; it's rather a common complaint among the men I know. As for Mr. De Boo, if he has low connections and vulgar entanglements, they are nothing to me. Good-day! Stop! You had better take this parcel of rubbish with you. Dawkins—the stage-door!"

And Aphasia found herself being ushered along the passage. Bewildered and dazzled by the glaring lights, the excitement and the strangeness, she ran almost into the arms of De Boo himself as he emerged from his dressing-room next the manageress's. Had he overheard? There had been a curtained-over door on that side. Under his paint his handsome features were black with rage; he caught the girl's shoulders in a furious grip, and spluttered in her ear:

"Damn you! Damn you, you sneaking creature! You have made a pretty mess of things for me—haven't you?—with your blab about my father and the boot-business, and my letters and the ring I gave you. To my dying day I'll never speak to you again!"

He threw her from him savagely and strode away.

Aphasia stood outside the theater and shook with sobs. It chanced—or did not chance, so queer are the vagaries of Destiny—that Ulick Snowle, the president of the New Stage-Door Club, happened to be passing; he had just called in at the box-office to privately book the first three rows of the upper circle on behalf of the club, the Old Stage-Doorers having secured the gallery. Both clubs were originally one, the Old Stage-Doorers having thrown off the younger club as the cuttlefish gets rid of the supernumerary limb which in time becomes

another cuttlefish. And the unwritten compact between both clubs is that if one applauds a new production, the other shall execrate the same—an arrangement which contributes hugely to the liveliness of first-nights.

No uninitiated person beholding Ulick, with his shaggy beard, aged felt-basin hat of Continental make, short nautical coat, and tight-fitting sporting trousers, would suppose him to be the great personage he really is. He came up to Aphasia, and bluntly asked her what was the matter, and if he couldn't do something? In her overwhelming woe and desolation, she was like the soda-water bottle of the glass-ball-stoppered description—once push in the stopper, there is no arresting the escape of the aërated fluid. She told the sympathizing Ulick all before he put her into the Hammersmith bus, and when he would have handed in the fateful brown-paper parcel—"Keep it," she said, with a gesture of aversion. "Burn it—chuck the thing in the dustbin. They're no manner o' use to me!" And away she rattled, leaving Ulick Snowle upon the pavement, in his hands an engine of destruction meet to be used in the extermination of the unfittest.

For the New Stage-Door Club did not love Mr. Leo De Boo, whose manner to old friends—whom he had often led around street corners and relieved of half-crowns—did not improve with his worldly prospects. And Ulick stood and meditated while the double torrent of the London traffic went roaring east and west; and as a charitable old lady was about to press a penny into his hand, Tom Glauber, the dandy president of the Old Stage-Doorers, came along, and the men greeted cordially. Von Glauber seemed interested in something that Ulick had to tell, and the two went off very confidentially, arm-in-arm.

"It would be a sensation if, for once, the O.S.D.'s and the N.S.D.'s acted in unison," agreed Tom Glauber.

And on the night when *Pride of Race* was produced at the Sceptre, both clubs attended in full strength, every man with a crook-handled walking-stick, and a parcel buttoned under his coat. The piece had just concluded a run of three hundred nights, and every reader is acquainted with the plot, which is of modern Italy and Rome of to-day, to quote the programme. We all know how the young Marchese di Monte Polverino, in whose veins ran the bluest blood of the Latin race, secretly wedded Aquella Guazetta, the tripe-seller, who had won his lofty affections in the guise of a Bulgarian Princess, and how the dread secret of Aquella's origin was revealed at the very moment when the loftiest and most exclusive of the Roman nobility were about to welcome the newly made Marchesa into their ranks. . . . Aquella, her brain turned by the acuteness of her mental suffering, greets the revelation with a peal of frenzied laughter. Now this laughter was a continual obstacle, during rehearsals, in the path of Mrs. Gudrun. Said she:

"The peculiarity and originality of my genius, as Cluffer says, consists in the fact that I can't do the things that might be expected of me—not for filberts; while I *can* do the things that mightn't. If I can't really hit off that laugh, I'll have a woman in the wings to do it for me. But my impression is that I shall be all right at night. Don't forget, Gormleigh, that you're not to tub the chandelier altogether; I hate to play to a dark house."

"Py vich innovation," said Gormleigh afterwards, "de gonsbirators vas enapled to garry out their blan. Himmel!" he cried, dabbing his overflowing eyes with an antediluvian silk pocket-handkerchief, "shall I effer forget—no, not vile I lif—de face of dot jung man!"

For at the moment when Monte Polverino's scorn of the lovely plebeian he has wedded is expressed in words—when Aquella, pierced to the heart by being called

“a low-born vulgarian” and a “peasant huckster,” is about to utter her famous yell of frenzied laughter, the Old Stage-Doorers and the New Stage-Doorers hung out their boots. A *chevaux de frise* of walking-sticks, from each of which depended a pair of these indispensable articles of attire, graced the gallery, distinguished the upper circle, and appeared upon the level of the pit. Stricken to the soul, faltering and ghastly under his paint, and shaking in the most sumptuous pair of patent leathers, white kid topped, in which he had yet appeared, De Boo blankly contemplated the horrid spectacle; while Mrs. Gudrun, to whose somewhat latent sense of humor the spectacle appealed, burst into peal upon peal of the wildest laughter ever heard beyond the walls of an establishment for the care of the mentally afflicted. “The grandeur, poignancy, and reality of the acting,” wrote Cluffer, of the *Morning Whooper*, “was acknowledged by a crowded house with a deafening and unanimous outburst of applause.”

“Both Mrs. Gudrun and Mr. De Boo attained the highest level of dramatic expression,” pronounced Mullekins, of the *Daily Tomahawk*. “It was the touch of Nature which attunes the universe to one throb of universal relationship.”

The play was a success. Even the “Boo’s!” of both the clubs, united for the nonce in disapprobation, could not rob Leo of his laurels. He wears them to-day, for *Pride of Race* has enjoyed a tremendous run.

“We’ve made the beggar’s reputation instead of sending him back to the boot-shop and that poor girl,” said Ulick Snowle to Tom Glauber next day.

“Possibly,” said Tom Glauber, sniffing at his inseparable carnation. “But it’s all the better for the girl, I imagine, in the long run.”

A SPIRIT ELOPEMENT

WHEN I exchanged my maiden name for better or worse, and dearest Vavasour and I, at the conclusion of the speeches—I was married in a traveling-dress of Bluefern's—descended the steps of mamma's house in Ebury Street—the Belgravian, *not* the Pimlican end—and, amid a hurricane of farewells and a hailstorm of pink and yellow and white *confetti*, stepped into the brougham that was to convey us to a Waterloo Station, *en route* for Southampton—our honeymoon was to be spent in Guernsey—we were perfectly well satisfied with ourselves and each other. This state of mind is not uncommon at the outset of wedded life. You may have heard the horrid story of the newly-wedded cannibal chief, who remarked that he had never yet known a young bride to disagree with her husband in the early stages of the honeymoon. I believe if dearest Vavasour had seriously proposed to chop me into *cotêlettes* and eat me, with or without sauce, I should have taken it for granted that the powers that be had destined me to the high end of supplying one of the noblest of created beings with an *entrée* dish.

We were idiotically blissful for two or three days. It was flowery April, and Guernsey was looking her loveliest. No horrid hotel or boarding-house sheltered our lawful endearments. Some old friends of papa's had lent us an ancient mansion standing in a wild garden, now one pink riot of almond-blossom, screened behind lofty walls of lichened red brick and weather-worn,

wrought-iron gates, painted yellow-white like all the other iron and wood work about the house.

“*Mon Désir*” the place was called, and the fragrance of potpourri yet hung about the old paneled salons. Vavasour wrote a sonnet—I have omitted to speak before of my husband’s poetic gifts—all about the breath of new Passion stirring the fragrant dust of dead old Love, and the kisses of lips long moldered that mingled with ours. It was a lovely sonnet, but crawly, as the poetical compositions of the Modern School are apt to be. And Vavasour was an enthusiastic convert to, and follower of, the Modern School. He had often told me that, had not his father heartlessly thrown him into his brewery business at the outset of his career—*Sim’s Mild and Bitter Ales* being the foundation upon which the family fortunes were originally reared—he, Vavasour, would have been, ere the time of speaking, known to Fame, not only as a Minor Poet, but a Minor Decadent Poet—which trisyllabic addition, I believe, makes as advantageous a difference as the word “native” when attached to an oyster, or the guarantee “new laid” when employed with reference to an egg.

Dear Vavasour’s temperament and tastes having a decided bias towards the gloomy and mystic, he had, before his great discovery of his latent poetical gifts, and in the intervals of freedom from the brain-carking and soul-stultifying cares of business, made several excursions into the regions of the Unknown. He had had some sort of intercourse with the Swedenborgians, and had mingled with the Muggletonians; he had coquetted with the Christian Scientists, and had been, until Theosophic Buddhism opened a wider field to his researches, an enthusiastic Spiritualist. But our engagement somewhat cooled his passion for psychic research, and when questioned by me with regard to table-rappings, manifestations, and materializations, I could not but be con-

scious of a reticence in his manner of responding to my innocent desire for information. The reflection that he probably, like Canning's knife-grinder, had no story to tell, soon induced me to abandon the subject. I myself am somewhat reserved at this day in my method of dealing with the subject of spooks. But my silence does not proceed from ignorance.

Knowledge came to me after this fashion. Though the April sun shone bright and warm upon Guernsey, the island nights were chill. Waking by dear Vavasour's side—the novelty of this experience has since been blunted by the usage of years—somewhere between one and two o'clock towards break of the fourth day following our marriage, it occurred to me that a faint cold draft, with a suggestion of dampness about it, was blowing against my right cheek. One of the windows upon that side—our room possessed a rather unbecoming cross-light—had probably been left open. Dear Vavasour, who occupied the right side of our couch, would wake with toothache in the morning, or, perhaps, with mumps! Shuddering, as much at the latter idea as with cold, I opened my eyes, and sat up in bed with a definite intention of getting out of it and shutting the offending casement. Then I saw Katie for the first time.

She was sitting on the right side of the bed, close to dear Vavasour's pillow; in fact, almost hanging over it. From the first moment I knew that which I looked upon to be no creature of flesh and blood, but the mere apparition of a woman. It was not only that her face, which struck me as both pert and plain; her hands; her hair, which she wore dressed in an old-fashioned ringletty mode—in fact, her whole personality was faintly luminous, and surrounded by a halo of bluish phosphorescent light. It was not only that she was transparent, so that I saw the pattern of the old-fashioned, striped, dimity bed-curtain, in the shelter of which she sat,

quite plainly through her. The consciousness was further conveyed to me by a voice—or the toneless, flat, faded impression of a voice—speaking faintly and clearly, not at my outer, but at my inner ear.

“Lie down again, and don’t fuss. It’s only Katie!” she said.

“Only Katie!” I liked that!

“I dare say you don’t,” she said tartly, replying as she had spoken, and I wondered that a ghost should exhibit such want of breeding. “But you have got to put up with me!”

“How dare you intrude here—and at such an hour!” I exclaimed mentally, for there was no need to wake dear Vavasour by talking aloud when my thoughts were read at sight by the ghostly creature who sat so familiarly beside him.

“I knew your husband before you did,” responded Katie, with a faint phosphorescent sneer. “We became acquainted at a *séance* in North-West London soon after his conversion to Spiritualism, and have seen a great deal of each other from time to time.” She tossed her shadowy curls with a possessive air that annoyed me horribly. “He was constantly materializing me in order to ask questions about Shakespeare. It is a standing joke in our Spirit world that, from the best educated spook in our society down to the most illiterate astral that ever knocked out ‘rapport’ with one ‘p,’ we are all expected to know whether Shakespeare wrote his own plays, or whether they were done by another person of the same name.”

“And which way was it?” I asked, yielding to a momentary twinge of curiosity.

Katie laughed mockingly. “There you go!” she said, with silent contempt.

“I wish *you* would!” I snapped back mentally. “It

seems to me that you manifest a great lack of refinement in coming here!"

"I cannot go until Vavasour has finished," said Katie pertly. "Don't you see that he has materialized me by dreaming about me? And as there exists *at present*"—she placed an annoying stress upon the last two words—"a strong sympathy between you, so it comes about that I, as your husband's spiritual affinity, am visible to your waking perceptions. All the rest of the time I am hovering about you, though unseen."

"I call it detestable!" I retorted indignantly. Then I gripped my sleeping husband by the shoulder. "Wake up! wake up!" I cried aloud, wrath lending power to my grasp and a penetrative quality to my voice. "Wake up and leave off dreaming! I cannot and will not endure the presence of this creature another moment!"

"*Whaa—*" muttered my husband, with the almost inebriate incoherency of slumber, "*whasamaramydarling?*"

"Stop dreaming about that creature," I cried, "or I shall go home to Mamma!"

"Creature?" my husband echoed, and as he sat up I had the satisfaction of seeing Katie's misty, luminous form fade slowly into nothingness.

"You know who I mean!" I sobbed. "Katie—your spiritual affinity, as she calls herself!"

"You don't mean," shouted Vavasour, now thoroughly roused, "that you have seen *her?*"

"I do mean it," I mourned. "Oh, if I had only known of your having an entanglement with any creature of the kind, I would never have married you—never!"

"Hang her!" burst out Vavasour. Then he controlled himself, and said soothingly: "After all, dearest, there is nothing to be jealous of——"

“I jealous! And of that——” I was beginning, but Vavasour went on:

“After all, she is only a disembodied astral entity with whom I became acquainted—through my fifth principle, which is usually well developed—in the days when I moved in Spiritualistic society. She was, when living—for she died long before I was born—a young lady of very good family. I believe her father was a clergyman . . . and I will not deny that I encouraged her visits.”

“Discourage them from this day!” I said firmly. “Neither think of her nor dream of her again, or I will have a separation.”

“I will keep her, as much as possible, out of my waking thoughts,” said poor Vavasour, trying to soothe me; “but a man cannot control his dreams, and she pervades mine in a manner which, even before our engagement, my pet, I began to find annoying. However, if she really is, as she has told me, a lady by birth and breeding, she will understand”—he raised his voice as though she were there and he intended her to hear—“that I am now a married man, and from this moment desire to have no further communication with her. Any suitable provision it is in my power to make——”

He ceased, probably feeling the difficulty he would have in explaining the matter to his lawyers; and it seemed to me that a faint mocking sniggle, or rather the auricular impression of it, echoed his words. Then, after some more desultory conversation, we fell soundly asleep. An hour may have passed when the same chilly sensation as of a damp draft blowing across the bed roused me. I rubbed my cheek and opened my eyes. They met the pale, impertinent smile of the hateful Katie, who was installed in her old post beside Vavasour’s end of the bolster.

“You see,” she said, in the same soundless way, and

with a knowing little nod of triumph, "it is no use. He is dreaming of me again!"

"Wake up!" I screamed, snatching the pillow from under my husband's head and madly hurling it at the shameless intruder. This time Vavasour was almost snappish at being disturbed. Daylight surprised us in the middle of our first connubial quarrel. The following night brought a repetition of the whole thing, and so on, *da capo*, until it became plain to us, to our mutual disgust, that the more Vavasour strove to banish Katie from his dreams, the more persistently she cropped up in them. She was the most ill-bred and obstinate of astrals—Vavasour and I the most miserable of newly-married people. A dozen times in a night I would be roused by that cold draft upon my cheek, would open my eyes and see that pale, phosphorescent, outline perched by Vavasour's pillow—nine times out of the dozen would be driven to frenzy by the possessive air and cynical smile of the spook. And although Vavasour's former regard for her was now converted into hatred, he found the thought of her continually invading his waking mind at the most unwelcome seasons. She had begun to appear to both of us *by day as well as by night* when our poisoned honeymoon came to an end, and we returned to town to occupy the house which Vavasour had taken and furnished in Sloane Street. I need only mention that Katie accompanied us.

Insufficient sleep and mental worry had by this time thoroughly soured my temper no less than Vavasour's. When I charged him with secretly encouraging the presence I had learned to hate, he rudely told me to think as I liked! He implored my pardon for this brutality afterwards upon his knees, and with the passage of time I learned to endure the presence of his attendant shade with patience. When she nocturnally hovered by the side of my sleeping spouse, or in constituency no less

filmy than a whiff of cigarette-smoke, appeared at his elbow in the face of day, I saw her plainly, and at these moments she would favor me with a significant contraction of the eyelid, which was, to say the least of it, unbecoming in a spirit who had been a clergyman's daughter. After one of these experiences it was that the idea which I afterwards carried into execution occurred to me.

I began by taking in a few numbers of a psychological publication entitled *The Spirit-Lamp*. Then I formed the acquaintance of Madame Blavant, the renowned Professoress of Spiritualism and Theosophy. Everybody has heard of Madame, many people have read her works, some have heard her lecture. I had heard her lecture. She was a lady with a strong determined voice and strong determined features. She wore her plentiful gray hair piled in sibylline coils on the top of her head, and—when she lectured—appeared in a white Oriental silk robe that fell around her tall gaunt figure in imposing folds. This robe was replaced by one of black satin when she held her *séances*. At other times, in the seclusion of her study, she was draped in an ample gown of Indian chintz innocent of cut, but yet imposing. She smiled upon my new-born desire for psychic instruction, and when I had subscribed for a course of ten private *séances* at so many guineas a piece she smiled more.

Madame lived in a furtive, retiring house, situated behind high walls in Endor's Grove, N.W. A long glass tunnel led from the garden gate to the street door, for the convenience of Mahatmas and other persons who preferred privacy. I was one of those persons, for not for spirit worlds would I have had Vavasour know of my repeated visits to Endor's Grove. Before these were over I had grown quite indifferent to supernatural manifestations, banjos and accordions that were thrummed by invisible performers, blood-red writing on

mediums' wrists, mysterious characters in slate-pencil, Planchette, and the Table Alphabet. And I had made and improved upon acquaintance with Simon.

Simon was a spirit who found me attractive. He tried in his way to make himself agreeable, and, with my secret motive in view—let me admit without a blush—I encouraged him. When I knew I had him thoroughly in hand, I attended no more *séances* at Endor's Grove. My purpose was accomplished upon a certain night, when, feeling my shoulder violently shaken, I opened the eyes which had been closed in simulated slumber to meet the indignant glare of my husband. I glanced over his shoulder. Katie did not occupy her usual place. I turned my glance towards the arm-chair which stood at my side of the bed. It was not vacant. As I guessed, it was occupied by Simon. There he sat, the luminously transparent appearance of a weak-chinned, mild-looking young clergyman, dressed in the obsolete costume of eighty years previously. He gave me a bow in which respect mingled with some degree of complacency, and glanced at Vavasour.

"I have been explaining matters to your husband," he said, in that soundless spirit-voice with which Katie had first made me acquainted. "He understands that I am a clergyman and a reputable spirit, drawn into your life-orbit by the irresistible attraction which your mediumistic organization exercises over my——"

"There, you hear what he says!" I interrupted, nodding confirmatively at Vavasour. "Do let me go to sleep!"

"What, with that intrusive beast sitting beside you?" shouted Vavasour indignantly. "Never!"

"Think how many months I have put up with the presence of Katie!" said I. "After all, it's only tit for tat!" And the ghost of a twinkle in Simon's pale eye seemed to convey that he enjoyed the retort.

Vavasour grunted sulkily, and resumed his recumbent position. But several times that night he awakened me with renewed objurgations of Simon, who with unflinching resolution maintained his post. Later on I started from sleep to find Katie's usual seat occupied. She looked less pert and confident than usual, I thought, and rather humbled and fagged, as though she had had some trouble in squeezing her way into Vavasour's sleeping thoughts. By day, after that night, she seldom appeared. My husband's brain was too much occupied with Simon, who assiduously haunted me. And it was now my turn to twit Vavasour with unreasonable jealousy. Yet though I gloried in the success of my stratagem, the continual presence of that couple of spooks was an unremitting strain upon my nerves.

But at length an extraordinary conviction dawned on my mind, and became stronger with each successive night. Between Simon and Katie an acquaintance had sprung up. I would awaken, or Vavasour would arouse, to find them gazing across the barrier of the bolster which divided them with their pale negatives of eyes, and chatting in still, spirit voices. Once I started from sleep to find myself enveloped in a kind of mosquito-tent of chilly, filmy vapor, and the conviction rushed upon me that He and She had leaned across our couch and exchanged an intangible embrace. Katie was the leading spirit in this, I feel convinced—there was no effrontery about Simon. Upon the next night I, waking, overheard a fragment of conversation between them which plainly revealed how matters stood.

“We should never have met upon the same plane,” remarked Simon silently, “but for the mediumistic intervention of these people. Of the man”—he glanced slightly towards Vavasour—“I cannot truthfully say I think much. The lady”—he bowed in my direction—“is everything that a lady should be!”

“You are infatuated with her, it is plain!” snapped Katie, “and the sooner you are removed from her sphere of influence the better.”

“Her power with me is weakening,” said Simon, “as Vavasour’s is with you. Our outlines are no longer so clear as they used to be, which proves that our astral individualities are less strongly impressed upon the brains of our earthly sponsors than they were. We are still materialized; but how long this will continue——” He sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

“Don’t let us wait for a formal dismissal, then,” said Katie boldly. “Let us throw up our respective situations.”

“I remember enough of the Marriage Service to make our union, if not regular, at least respectable,” said Simon.

“And I know quite a fashionable place on the Outside Edge of Things, where we could settle down,” said Katie, “and live practically on nothing.”

I blinked at that moment. When I saw the room again clearly, the chairs beside our respective pillows were empty.

Years have passed, and neither Vavasour nor myself has ever had a glimpse of the spirits whom we were the means of introducing to one another. We are quite content to know ourselves deprived for ever of their company. Yet sometimes, when I look at our three babies, I wonder whether that establishment of Simon’s and Katie’s on the Outside Edge of Things includes a nursery.

THE WIDOW'S MITE

PEOPLE bestowed that nickname upon little Lord Garlingham years ago, when he was the daintiest of human playthings ever adored by a young mother. Shutting my eyes, I can recall him, all golden curls and frills, sitting on the front seat of the victoria with Toto, the Maltese. Japanese pugs had not then come into fashion, nor the ubiquitous automobile. Gar is the Widow's Mite still, but for other reasons. He was a charming, irresolute, impulsive child, who invariably meant "macaroons" when he said "sponge cake." It recurs to me that he was passionately fond of dolls, not nigger Sambo dolls, or sailor dolls, or Punchinelli with curved caps and bells, or policemen with large feet so cunningly weighted that it is next door to impossible to knock them over, but frilled and furbelowed dollies of the gentler sex. There was a blue princess in tulle with a glass chandelier-drop tiara, and a dancing girl in pink, and a stout, shapeless, rag lady, whose features were painted on the calico ball that represented her head, and whose hair resembled the fringe of a black woollen shawl. Holding her by one leg, Gar would sink to sleep upon his lace-trimmed pillows in a halo of shining curls, and Lady Garlingham's last new friend or latest new adorer would be brought up to the night nursery for an after-dinner peep at "my precious in his cot."

"My precious" was equally charming in his Eton days, when his sleepy green eyes looked up at you from under a lock of fair silky hair that was never to be kept

within regulation School bounds, but continually strayed upon the fair, if freckled, expanse of a brow which might have been the home of a pure and innocent mind, and probably was not. He had a pleasant treble boy's voice and a beautiful smile, particularly when his mother told him he might smoke just one cigarette, of her own special brand, as a great treat.

"Mother's are hay," he said afterwards in confidence, and added that he preferred cut Cavendish, and that the best way to induce a meerschaum to color was to smoke it foul, and never to remove the dottle. But Lady Garlingham was never the wiser. She had the utmost faith in her boy.

"Gar will be a dab at Classics," she said with pride. "Fancy his knowing that Dido was a heathen goddess, and Procrustes was a Grecian King who murdered his mother and afterwards put out his own eyes! I must really give his tutor a hint not to bring him on *too* fast. He will have to make his own way in the world, poor dear, that is certain; but I don't want him to turn out a literary genius with eccentric clothes, or anything in the scientific line that isn't careful about its nails and doesn't comb its hair."

Garlingham's clothes are always of the latest fashion and in the most admirable taste. His hair is as well groomed, his hands are as immaculate as any mother's heart could desire, and he has not turned out a genius. During his career at Oxford he did not allow his love of study to interfere with the more serious pursuit of athletic distinction. He left the University unburdened with honors, carrying in his wake a string of bills as long as a kite's tail. Relieved of this by the sacrifice of some of Lady Garlingham's diamonds, the kite shot up into the empyrean in the wake of a dazzling star of the comic-opera stage.

"But, thank Heaven, the boy has principles,"

breathed Lady Garlingham. "He never dreamed of marrying her!"

Garlingham descended from the skies ere long, tangled in a telegraphic wire, and went into the Diplomatic Service. He became fourth under-secretary at an Imperial foreign Embassy, in virtue of the marriage of his maternal aunt with Prince John Schulenstorff-Wangelbrode (who was Military Attaché in the days of the pannier and the polonaise, the bustle and the fringed whip-parasol). I have not the least idea in what Garlingham's duties consisted, and the dear fellow was diplomatically reticent when sounded on the subject; but of one thing I am sure, that few young men have worn an official button and lapels with greater ease and distinction. He quite adored his mother, and made her his *confidante* in all his love affairs. Indeed I believe Lady Garlingham kept a little register of these at one time on the sticks of an ivory fan—those that were going off, those that were in full bloom, and those that were just coming on; and posted up dates and set down names with the utmost regularity.

For, like the typical butterfly, Garlingham sipped every flower and changed every hour. A very mature Polly has now his passion requited, and if human happiness depended on *avoirdupois*, and it were an established mathematical fact that the felicity of the object attracted may be calculated by the dimensions of the object attracting, then is the handsome boy I used to tip a happy man indeed.

For Gar, "that pocket edition of Apollo," as a Royal personage with a happy knack at nicknames termed him—Gar has married a middle-aged, not too good-looking, extremely fat widow, unknown to fame as Mrs. Rollo Polkingham. The couple were Hanover Squared in June. Leila and Sheila Polkingham made the loveliest

pair of Dresden china bridesmaids imaginable, and a Bishop tied the knot, assisted by the brother of the bride, the Reverend Michael O'Halloran, of Mount Slattery, County Quare, a surpliced brogue with a Trinity College B.A. hood. The hymns that were sung by the choir during the ceremony were, "The Voice that Breathed," and "Fight the Good Fight," and the bride looked quite as bridal as might have been expected of a thirty-eight inch girth arrayed in the latest heliotrope shade. She became peony, Garlingham pale blue, when the moment arrived for him to pronounce his vows, and a voice—a high, nasal voice of the penetrating, saw-edged American kind—said, several pews behind, quite audibly: "Well, I call it child-stealing!"

The owner of that voice was at the reception in Chesterfield Crescent. So was I, and when Garlingham thanked me for a silver cigar-box I had sent him in memory of our old friendship, his hand was damp and clammy, though he smiled. The Dowager Lady Garlingham, looking much younger than her daughter-in-law, floated across to ask me why I never came to see her now, and Gar drifted away. Later, I had a fleeting glimpse of the bridegroom standing in the large, cool shadow of his newly-made bride, looking helplessly from one to the other of his recently-acquired stepdaughters. Then my circular gaze met and merged in the still attractive eyes of Lady Garlingham.

"You heard," she breathed in her old confidential way, "what that very outspoken person—I think a Miss Van Something, from Philadelphia—said in church?"

"I did hear," I returned, "and, while I deplored her candor, I could not but admit——"

"That she had hit off the situation with dreadful accuracy—I felt that, too," sighed Gar's mother.

"We are old friends, or were," said I, for people al-

ways became sentimental in the vicinity of Lady Garlingham. "Tell me how it happened!"

"Oh, how——" Lady Garlingham adroitly turned a slight groan into a little cough. "Indeed, I hardly know. All that seems burned into me is that I have become a dowager without adequate cause."

Her pretty brown eyebrows crumpled; she dabbed her still charming eyes with an absurd little lace handkerchief. She wore a wonderful dress of something filmy in Watteau blue, and a Lamballe hat with a *paradis*. Through innumerable veils of tulle her complexion was really wonderful, considering, and her superb hair still tawny gold.

"Don't look at me and ask yourself why I've never married again," she commanded, in the old petulant way. "For Gar's sake, is the stereotyped answer to that. And when I look at *her*——" She dabbed away a tear with the absurd little handkerchief. "She hasn't had the indecency to call me 'Mother' *yet*. . . . But she will, I know she will! If she doesn't, she is more than human. I have said such things to *her*."

"I can quite believe it," I agreed.

Champagne cups were going about; infinitesimal sandwiches, tabloids of condensed indigestion, were being washed down. The best man, an Attaché friend of Garlingham's, brandishing a silver-handled carving-knife, was encouraging the bridling bride to attack the cake. Sheila and Leila hovered near with silver baskets, and Garlingham, with the merest shadow of his old easy *insouciance*, was replying to the statute and legendary chaff of the other men.

"You know he was engaged to the second girl, Sheila, first?" went on Lady Garlingham plaintively.

I had not known it, and it gave me a thrill.

"Indeed!" I said in a tone of polite inquiry.

"When he was a very little boy, and I took him into

a shop to buy a toy," said poor Lady Garlingham, "he always was in raptures with it, whatever it was, until we were half-way home, and *then* nothing would satisfy him but the carriage being turned round and driven back, so that he might exchange the thing for something he had particularly disliked at first."

I recalled the trait in my own experience of my young friend.

"Ah, yes. He always took *pralines* when he really wanted chocolate fondants," sighed his mother. "And then—but perhaps you have forgotten—the dolls?"

I had forgotten the dolls. I suppose I gaped rather stupidly.

"He had three," gulped Lady Garlingham. "He chose the blue one first, and then, when we had just reached Hyde Park Gate, he cried, and said it was the pink one he had wanted all along. So we went back and got her, and drove home to lunch, which, of course, was Gar's dinner. And then, if you had seen him, poor darling,"—her maternal bosom heaved with a repressed sob—"with his underlip turned down in a quite South Sea Island way, and the tears tumbling into his rice pudding because the blue creature was absolutely his ideal from the first, you would have been foolish enough to order the carriage and drive him back to the Regent Street toyshop."

"As you did?"

"As I did," admitted Lady Garlingham.

"With the result that might have been expected?"

"With the result that seems to me *now* to be a hateful foreshadowing of what was to be my poor darling's fate in life," said the poor darling's mother. . . . "No, thank you, Sheila dear, I positively could not touch it," she added, as the cake-basket came our way. "Not even to dream on—I have quite done with dreaming now."

"But how," I asked hypercritically, "could Garling-

ham's subsequent choice of the blue doll, originally discarded in favor of the pink, foreshadow his ultimate fate in life?"

"Oh, don't you understand?" quavered poor Lady Garlingham. "He went into the toyshop by himself, and came marching out with what the Americans call a rag-baby, the most odious, distorted, shapeless horror you can imagine. It fascinated him by its sheer ugliness. He was obsessed, magnetized, compelled. . . . As in this case!" A burst of confidence broke down the flood-gates of the poor woman's reserve. She grasped me by the arm as she gurgled out hysterically—rocking her slight form to and fro: "My dear, *she* is the rag-doll, this awful widow creature Garlingham has married. And to his fatal curse of indecision he owes the Incubus that is crushing him to-day."

The bride had tripped upstairs to put on her going-away gown, attended by Leila and Sheila and some freshly-married women, who meant to struggle for the slippers for second choice.

Loud, explosive bursts of jeering merriment came from the dining-room, where most of the men of the party had congregated. An exhausted maid and a very obvious private detective hovered in the neighborhood of the display of wedding presents, and through the open door of the drawing-room one caught a glimpse of suspiciously new luggage piled up in the hall, and a little group of youths and maidens of the callower kind, who were industriously packing the sunshades and umbrellas in the holdalls with rice and confetti.

"My poor, poor boy has been in and out of love *hundreds* of times," moaned the despairing Dowager, "without once having been actually engaged. So that when I saw Gar with these three women sitting on four green chairs in the Park in May, I was not seriously alarmed. Georgiana Bayham told me that the stout woman with

too many bangles was a Mrs. Rollo Polkingham, a widow, of whom nobody who might with truth be styled anybody had ever heard, and that she had a wild, jungly house in Chesterfield Crescent—(don't those climbing peacocks in the wall-paper set your teeth on edge?)—and always asked young men to call—and wanted to know their intentions at the third visit. . . . 'I would give this turquoise charm off my *porte-bonheur*,' said Georgiana, in her loud, bubbling voice, 'to know which of the two daughters Gar is smitten with. The girl with the eyes like black ballot-balls, or the other with the Gaiety smile.' . . . My dear, it was the dark one, Leila, as it happened. Not that Gar flirted desperately. But they went to Hurlingham and lunched at Prince's, and then the mother thought my boy hooked, and struck——"

"Asked his intentions?" I hinted.

"I knew something had happened," said Gar's mother, "when he came in to tea with me that very afternoon. 'Mother, am I a villain?' were his very words. 'No, dear,' I said, 'do you feel like one?' Then it came out that the Polkingham woman had asked his intentions with regard to Leila; and never having had such a thing done to him before, poor, dear boy! Gar was quite prostrated. He did not deny that he found the eldest Polkingham girl attractive, but secretly he had been more closely drawn to the second, Sheila."

"The pink doll," I murmured.

"He behaved with the nicest honor in the matter," declared Lady Garlingham. "When he told me he was really in love with Sheila, and could never be happy until he had married her—and how a young woman with such a muddy complexion could inspire such a passion I don't pretend to know—I said: 'Very well, you have my permission to tell her so. I shall never stand in the way of your happiness, my son—although these people

are not in Our Set.' If you had seen his shining eyes. If you had heard the thrill in his voice as he said, 'What a rattling good sort you are, mother!' you would have felt with me that the sacrifice was worth it. And then he rushed off in a hansom to declare himself." Lady Garlingham clutched my arm painfully.

"To declare himself to Sheila?"

"And came back within the space of half an hour engaged to Leila," panted Lady Garlingham. "No, don't laugh!"

"The b-blue d-doll!" I gasped.

"He was as pale as death!" said his mother. "He had found Leila in the drawing-room in a becoming half-light, and been taken off his guard."

"And metaphorically he told the shopwoman he would prefer that one," I said shakily. "I understand! Was he very unhappy over his bargain?"

"Frightfully out of sorts and off color," said the wooer's mother, "until at a crisis, a month later, I nerved him to go and see the mother and explain the mistake."

"And did he?"

"I will say Mrs. Polkingham took the revelation in good part," said Lady Garlingham. "Leila cried a good deal, I believe, when she turned Gar over to Sheila, and Sheila was not disagreeably inclined to crow. I must give the girls credit for their behavior. As for Gar, he was the very picture of young, ardent happiness. 'Mother,' I can hear him saying, 'thanks to you, I have won the dearest and loveliest girl in the world.' (Poor boy!) 'And I'm as happy as a gardener.'"

"Did that phase last long?" I queried, with twitching facial muscles.

"He began to flag, as it were, in about six weeks," said Garlingham's mother mournfully. "My poor, affectionate, *wobbly* boy. The sky of his simple happiness was overcast. There came a day when the floodgates of his

resolve to go through with everything at any cost—sacrifice himself for the sake of his duty and for the credit of his family name——”

“*Noblesse oblige*,” I stammered chokily. “*Noblesse oblige*.”

“The floodgates were broken down,” said his mother, with a tremble in her voice. “His heart reverted with a bound to the—the other—to Leila.”

“To the blue doll!” I spluttered.

“When he entreated me,” went on Lady Garlingham, “begged me even with tears to be his ambassadress to Leila, I grieve to say that for the first time in his life I failed to rise to the occasion of his need. I said: ‘I shall do nothing of the kind. Get out of the muddle as you can—I wash my hands of it.’ And he thought me very hard and very unfeeling, I know; but even when the *bouleversement* was managed for the third time, I could not bring myself to regard the position from my usually philosophical point of view. It was too cruel. The re-transfer of the engagement-ring, for instance——”

“Ah, true,” I murmured, “and the presents!”

“Too painful!” sighed Lady Garlingham. “It was ultimately arranged by Gar’s buying a new ring, and Sheila’s dropping the old one into the almsbag at St. Baverstock’s. Poor girl! I will say her demeanor in the trying circumstances was admirable.”

“As for the other?” I hinted.

“Leila is not a refined type of girl,” said Lady Garlingham decidedly. “Her whole expression was that of a Bank Holiday tripper young person who has just dismounted from one of those giddy-go-rounds. Boat-swings might impart the dazed look. The mother seemed harassed. As for Gar——”

I guessed what was coming, but I would not have missed hearing Lady Garlingham tell it for worlds.

“There came a day—a dreadful, dreadful day,” she said, with pale lips, “when Gar told me that his life was

ruined *unless he changed back!* We had a *dreadful scene*, and for the first time in my life I had hysterics. Then the unhappy boy tore from the house—*ventre à terre*—leaving me a perfect wreck, held up by my maid Pinner—you know Pinner?"

I nodded speechlessly.

"My wretched boy tore from the house, jumped into his 'Gohard,' which was standing at the door—hurtled to Chesterfield Crescent—told the painful truth——"

"Swopped dolls yet once again, and came back with the rag-baby," I gasped.

"*And now,*" groaned Lady Garlingham, "he has to carry it through life!"

There was a gabbling on the upper landing. The bride was coming down in a white cut-cloth, tailor-made gown and a picture hat, Leila and Sheila and a bonneted maid following. The bridegroom, in immaculate tweeds, appeared at a lower door, the smug face of his valet behind him. There was a rush of women, an insane kissing and shaking of hands, a glare of red carpet, a flapping of striped awning. Rice and confetti impregnated the air, the doorsteps were swamped with smartly-dressed people. The chauffeur of Gar's "Gohard" with a giant favor in the buttonhole of his livery coat grinned when Garlingham leaped tigerishly upon him and tore it from his chest. The automobile moved on, pursued by farewells. Some one had thoughtfully attached two slippers to its rearward steps, a stout, elderly, white satin slipper and a slim masculine, evening shoe of the pump kind, almost new.

"Say!" said the saw-edged American voice I had heard in the church—"say, won't the car-conductor allow she's traveling with her little boy? What will folks call him, anyhow?"

My mouth was on a level with the speaker's back hair.

"The Widow's Mite," I said aloud—and fled.

SUSANNA AND HER ELDERS

I

THE Earl of Beaumaris, a worthy and imposing personage, flushed from the nape of his neck to the high summit of his cranium—premature baldness figured amongst the family hereditaries—paced, in creaking patent-leather boots, up and down the castle library—a noble apartment of Tudor design, lined with rare and antique volumes into which none ever looked. There were other persons present beside the Dowager Countess, and, to judge by the strainedly polite expression of their faces, the squeaking leather must have been playing havoc with their nerves.

“Gustavus,” said the Dowager at length, “you’re an English Peer in your own castle, and not a pointsman on a Broadway block, unless I’m considerably mistaken. Sit down!”

“Mother, I will not be defied!” said Lord Beaumaris. “I will not be bearded by my own child—a mere chit of a girl! Had Susanna been a boy I should have known how to deal with this spirit of insubordination. Being a girl—and moreover, motherless—I abandon her to you. She has many things to learn, but let the first lesson you inculcate be this—that I positively refuse to be defied!”

“The child has, I gather, gone out to take the air when she ought to have stayed in and taken a scolding,” said Lady Beaumaris. “Does anybody know of her whereabouts?”

Alaric Osmond-Omer, a languid, drab-complexioned, light-haired man of aristocratic appearance, never seen without the smoked eyeglass that concealed a diabolic squint, spoke:

“I saw her in a crimson golfing-jacket and a white Tam-o’-shanter crossing the upper terrace. She carried an alpenstock, and was followed by quite a pack of dogs—incorporated in the body of one extraordinary mongrel which I have occasionally observed about the stable-yards. I gathered that she was going for a climb upon the cliffs. That was about half an hour ago!”

“Alaric, you have attended every Family Council that I recollect since I became a member of this family, and have never before opened your lips,” said Lady Beaumaris, fixing the unfortunate Alaric with her eye, which was still black and snappingly bright. “Make this occasion memorable by offering a suggestion. You really owe us one!”

Everybody present looked at Alaric, who smiled helplessly and dropped his eyeglass, revealing the physical peculiarity it concealed. The effect of the diabolic squint, in combination with his mild features and somewhat foolish expression, conveyed a general impression of reserve force. He spoke, fumbling for the missing article, which had plunged rapturously into his bosom, with long, trim fingers, encrusted with mourning rings.

“The question at issue is—unless I have failed in my mental digest of the situation—how to bring Susanna Viscountess Lymston—pardon me if I indulge a little my weakness for prolixity——”

The door creaked, and Alaric broke off.

“My dear man,” said the Dowager, “I never before heard you utter a sentence of more than two words’ length!”

“—To bring Susanna, who is just seventeen and fiercely virginal in her expressed aversion to, and avoid-

ance of, ordinary, everyday Man—into compliance with your paternal wishes”—Alaric bowed to Lord Beaumaris—“where the encouragement of a suitor is concerned!”

“I have appealed to her filial feelings—which do not appear to exist,” said Lord Beaumaris; “I have appealed to her reason—I doubt gravely whether the girl possesses any: ‘There is too much landed property, there are too many houses and too many heirlooms, and there is not enough ready money to keep things going,’ I said. Her reply was: ‘Sell some of the land and some of the houses and all of the pictures, and then there will be enough to keep up the rest.’ ‘My dear child, is it possible,’ I said, ‘that at your age, and occupying the position you occupy, you have no idea of what is meant by an Entail?’ Then I made her sit down here, in this library, opposite me, and laid plainly before her why it is necessary for her, as my daughter, to marry, and to marry Wealth, Position, and Title. Before I had ended she rose with a flaming face and burst into an hysterical tirade, which lasted ten minutes. I gather that she was willing to marry Sir Prosper Le Gai or the Knight of the Swan if either of these gentlemen proposed for her hand. Neither being available, she intends, I gather, to write great poems, or paint great pictures, or go upon the stage. . . . Go upon the stage! My blood curdled at the bare idea. It is still in that unpleasant condition.” Lord Beaumaris shuddered violently, and pressed his handkerchief to his nose. “If you have any advice to give, Alaric,” he said bluntly, “oblige us by giving it. We are at a positive crux!”

The drab-complexioned, light-haired Alaric responded:

“In my poor opinion—which may be crassly wrong—too much stress has been laid upon the necessity of Susanna’s marrying.” At this point the contrast between the amiable vacuity of Alaric’s face and the Mephisto-

phelian intelligence of his monocled eye was so extraordinary as to hold his listeners spellbound in their chairs. "I think we may take it that the principal feature of the child's character is—call it determination amounting to obstinacy——"

"Crass obstinacy!" burst from the Earl.

"Pig-headedness!" interjected the Dowager.

"I think I remember hearing that in her nursery days the sure way to make her take a dose of harmless necessary medicine," pursued Alaric, his left eye fixed upon the door, "was to prepare the potion, pill, or what-not, sweeten, and then carefully conceal it from her. Were she my daughter—which Heaven for—which Heaven has not granted!—I should make her take a husband in the same way."

"An utterance possibly inspired, but as obscure as the generality. I fear, my dear Alaric——" Lord Beaumaris began. The Dowager cut him short.

"Say, Gus, can't you let him finish? That's what I call real mean—to switch a man off just when he's beginning to grip the track."

"Mother, I bow to you," Lord Beaumaris said, purpling with indignation. "Pray continue, Alaric!"

"Hum along, Alaric," encouraged the Dowager.

Alaric, his countenance as the countenance of a little child, his right eye beaming with mildness, and his left eye as the eye of an intelligent fiend, went on:

"Susanna has never yet seen the Duke of Halcyon—her cousin, and the husband for whom you destine her. When she does see him—I think I may be pardoned for saying——"

"She'll raise Cain," agreed Lady Beaumaris. "Girls think such heaps of good looks; I was like that myself, before I married your father, Gus."

"My dear mother, granted that Halcyon's gifts, both physical and mental, are not"—the Earl coughed—

“not of the kind best calculated to impress and win upon a romantic, willful girl! . . . He is, to speak plainly——”

“A hideous little Troglodyte,” nodded the Dowager, over her interminable Shetland-wool knitting.

“Odd, considering that his mother, when Lady Flora MacCodrum, was, with the sole exception of myself, the handsomest young woman presented in the Spring of 1845.”

“Mother,” said Lord Beaumaris, “delightful as your reminiscences invariably are, Alaric is waiting to resume.”

“I had merely intended to suggest,” said Alaric, twirling his eyeglass by its black ribbon and turning his demure drab-colored countenance and balefully glittering left eye upon the Earl and the Dowager in turn, “that the Duke of Halcyon, like the rhubarb of Susanna’s infancy, should be rendered tolerable, agreeable, and even desirable to our dear girl’s palate, by being forbidden and withheld. Ask him here in September for the partridge shooting—as I understand you think of doing—but let him appear, not in his own character as a young English Peer of immense wealth and irreproachable reputation, but as one of those literary and artistic Ineligibles, who are encouraged by Society to take every liberty with it—short of marrying its cousins, sisters, or daughters. Let him encourage his hair to grow—wear a velvet coat, a flamboyant necktie, and silk stockings in combination with tweed knickerbockers. Let him pay attention to Susanna—as marked as he chooses. And do you, for your part”—he fixed Lord Beaumaris with his gleaming left eye—“discourage those attentions, and lose no opportunity of impressing upon your daughter that she is to discourage them too. Given this tempting opportunity of manifesting her independent spirit, you will find—or I know

nothing of Susanna—that it will be pull baker, pull devil. And I know which will pull the hardest!”

Lord Beaumaris rose to his feet in superb indignation. He struck the attitude in which he had posed for his portrait, by Millais, which hung at the upper end of the library, representing him in the act of delivering his maiden speech in Parliament—an address advocating the introduction of footwarmers into the Upper House, and opened upon Alaric:

“Your proposal—I do not hesitate to say it—is audacious. You deliberately expect that I—I, Gustavus Templebar Bloundle-Abbott Bloundle, ninth Earl of Beaumaris, and head of this ancient family—should stoop to carry out a deception—and upon my only child. That I should take advantage of her willful youth, her undisciplined temper, to——”

“To bring about a match that will set every mother’s mouth watering, and secure your daughter’s son a dukedom, and a hundred and thirty thousand a year. . . . That’s so, and I guess,” said Lady Beaumaris, “you’ll do it, Gus! You’re a representative English peer, it’s true, but on my side you’ve Yankee blood in you, and the grandson of Elijah K. Van Powler isn’t going to back out of a little bluff that’s going to pay. No, sir!” The Dowager ran her knitting-needles through her wool ball, and rolled up her work briskly. “He’ll do it, Alaric,” she said with conviction.

“Mother,” exclaimed the Earl in desperation. “You were my father’s choice, and Heaven forbid that I should fail in respect towards a lady whom he honored with his hand. But when you suggest that to bring about this most desirable union, I should wallow, metaphorically, in dirt——”

“It’s pay dirt, Gus,” said the Dowager. “A hundred and thirty thousand a year, my boy!”

“Mother!” cried Lord Beaumaris. “If I brought my-

self to grovel to such infamy, do you suppose for one moment Halcyon——”

“That Halcyon would tumble to the plot? There are no flies on Halcyon,” said the Dowager, “and you bet he’ll worry through—velvet coat, orange necktie, forehead, curls, and all!”

“Then do I understand,” said Lord Beaumaris helplessly, “that I am to ask him to accept my hospitality in a character that is not his own, and appear at my table in a disguise! The idea is inexpressibly loathsome, and I cannot imagine in what character he could possibly appear.”

“As a painter—of the fashionable fresco brand—engaged if you like to decorate your new ballroom!” put in Alaric in his level expressionless tones.

“But he can’t paint!” said the Dowager. “That’s where we’re going to buckle up and collapse. He can’t paint worth a cent! That takes brain, and Halcyon isn’t overstocked with ’em, I must allow.”

“Get a man who has the brain and the ability to do the work,” said the imperturbable Alaric.

“Deception on deception!” groaned Lord Beaumaris.

“I have the very fellow in my eye,” pursued Alaric: “Remarkable clever A.R.A., and a kinsman of your own. Perhaps you have forgotten him,” he continued, as Lord Beaumaris stiffened with polite inquiry, and the Dowager elevated her handsome and still jetty eyebrows into interrogative arches; “perhaps—it’s equally likely—you never heard of him, but at least you remember his mother, Janetta Bloundle?”

“She married a person professionally interested in the restoration of Perpendicular churches,” said Lord Beaumaris, “and though I cannot now recall his name, I remember hearing of his death, and forwarding a brief, condolatory postcard to his widow.”

“Who joined him, wherever he is, six months ago.”

“Dear me!” said Lord Beaumaris, “that is quite too regrettable. However, it is too late in the day to send another postcard addressed to the surviving members of the family.”

“There is only a son,” said Alaric, “and he is the rising artist to whom I suggest that you should offer a commission. He is strong in fresco, and has just executed a series of wall cartoons for the new Naval and Military Idiot Asylum, which will carry his name down to the remotest posterity.”

“Might—I—ah!—ask his name?” said Lord Beaumaris.

“Wopse,” responded Alaric.

Lord Beaumaris shuddered.

“And the Christian prefix?” He closed his eyes in readiness for the coming shock.

“Halcyon.”

Lord Beaumaris opened his eyes, and the Dowager uttered a slight snort of astonishment.

“A relationship existing upon the mother’s side between young Wopse and the ducal house of Halcyon,” said Alaric, twirling his eyeglass faster: “it is not surprising that the poor lady should have improved upon the homespun Anglo-Saxonism of Wopse by the best means in her power. At any rate the young fellow is well-looking and well-bred enough to carry both names in a creditable fashion.”

“You’ve taken considerable of a time about making it,” said Lady Beaumaris, “but I’m bound to say your suggestion ain’t worth shucks. Given the real artistic and Bohemian article to nibble at, is a girl like Susanna likely to swallow the imitation article? I guess not!”

“I concur entirely with my mother, Alaric,” said Lord Beaumaris. “You propose, in the person of this young man, to introduce an element of danger into our limited September house-party.”

“You could let this Mr. Wopse live in the garden *châlet*, and commission the keeper’s wife to attend to him,” said the Dowager, “but even then, how are you to make sure that——”

“That Susanna does not associate with him? There is a simple method of divesting the young man of all attraction for a young creature of our dear girl’s temperament,” said Alaric, “but for several reasons I shrink from recommending its selection.”

“Pray mention it,” said Lord Beaumaris, with an uneasy laugh.

“Let’s hear it!” said Lady Beaumaris.

“You have only,” said Alaric, with great distinctness, “to call this young fellow by his Christian name; to let him take Lady Beaumaris in to dinner; to put him up in your best room—the Indian chintz suite—and generally to foster the idea——”

“That he is the Duke of Halcyon!” cried the Dowager. “My stars! what a Palais Royal farce to be played under this respectable old roof.”

“You suggest a double—a doubly-infamous and objectionable deception! Not a word more. . . . I will not hear it!” Lord Beaumaris rapped decidedly on the table, rose in agitation, and strode on creaking patent leathers to the door. “The question is closed forever,” said he, turning upon the threshold. “Let no one refer to it again in my——”

The door, which had occasionally creaked throughout this discussion, smartly opened from without, and acting upon the Earl’s offended person as a battering-ram, caused him to run forwards smartly, tripping over the edge of the worn, but still splendid Turkey carpet. Lord Beaumaris saved himself by clinging to the high back of an ancestral chair, upon the seat of which he subsided, as the tall young figure of his daughter appeared on the threshold, her Tam-o’-shanter cap, her long yellow

locks, and her red golfing jacket shining with moisture, her fresh cheeks red with the cold kisses of the March winds.

"It began to snow like Happy Jack," said Susanna, pulling off her rough beaver gauntlet gloves, "so I came home. Well, have you all done plotting? You look like conspirators—all—with the exception of Alaric."

This was true, for while the Earl, his mother, and three other members of the family council, whom we have not found it necessary to describe, wore an air of somewhat guilty perturbation, the drab-colored, mild countenance of Alaric, its diabolical left eye now blandly shuttered with its tinted eyeglass, alone appeared guiltless and unmoved.

"We've been discussing the September house-party," explained this Catesby, as Susanna sat upon the elbow of his chair and affectionately rumbled his sparse, light-colored locks.

"And husbands for me!" said Susanna, half throttling Alaric with her strong young arm.

"Susanna!" cried her father. "I am surprised! I say no more than that I am surprised!"

"And I say," retorted Susanna, in clear, defiant, ringing accents, as she swayed herself to and fro upon her narrow perch, "that it is *bestly* to be expected to marry just because money has got to be brought into the family. Of course I *shall* marry one day—I don't want to study law, or be a hospital nurse like that idiotic Laura Pengebury. But I don't want to be a married woman until I'm tired of being a girl. I want to have lots of fun and do lots of things, and see lots of people, and make my mind up for my own self. And——"

Lord Beaumaris, who had long been fermenting, frothed over. "When you form an alliance, my child, you will form it with my sanction and my approval, and the husband you honor with your hand will be a

person selected and approved of by me. By me! I will choose for you——”

“And suppose I choose for myself afterwards!” cried Susanna, blue fire flashing from her defiant eyes.

“*Every woman is at heart—ahem!*” muttered Alaric, as Lord Beaumaris strove with incipient apoplexy. Susanna continued, with a whimper in her voice:

“The young men you and grandmother point out to me as nice and eligible, and all that, are simply awful. They have no chins, or too much, and no teeth, or too many, and they don’t talk at all, or they gabble all the time, about nothing. They never read, they don’t care for Art or Poetry—they aren’t interested in anything but Bridge and racing; and if you told them that Beethoven composed the ‘Honeysuckle and the Bee,’ or that Chopin wrote ‘When I Marry Amelia,’ they’d believe you. They like married women better than girls, and people who dance at theaters better than the married women——”

“Pet, you’d better go to Mademoiselle. . . . Ask her, with my love, to fix you up some French history to translate,” Lady Beaumaris suggested.

“I should prefer a Gallic verb,” Lord Beaumaris amended. “I marry in accordance with my parents’ wishes. Thou marriest in accordance with thy parents’ wishes. He marries—and so on! And make a solid schoolroom tea while you are about it, my child,” he continued, as Susanna bestowed a parting strangle upon Alaric, kicked over a footstool, and rose to leave the room. “For I fear we are to be deprived of your society at dinner this evening.”

Susanna’s lovely red underlip pouted; her blue eyes clouded with tears. She flashed a resentful look at her sire, and went out.

“She is not manageable by any ordinary methods,” said Lord Beaumaris, running his forefinger round the

inside of his collar, and shaking his head. "In such a case Contumacy must be combated with Craft, and Defiance met with Diplomacy. Alaric, regrettable as is the course you have counseled us to pursue, I feel inclined to adopt it. . . . I shall write to-night to make an appointment on Wednesday with the Duke of Halcyon at the Peers' Club, and—I shall be obliged if you will, at your early convenience—favor me with the address of the young man Wopse."

II

The garden *châlet* was damp; it had been raining, and the glittering appearance of the walls betrayed the fact. "As though a bally lot of snails had been dancin' a cotillon on 'em!" said the Duke of Halcyon. He yawned dismally as he opened the casement and leaned out, looking, in his gaudily-hued silken night-suit, like a tulip drooping from the window-sill. Then the keeper's wife came splashing up the muddy path carrying a tray covered with a mackintosh, and the knowledge that his breakfast would presently be set before him, and set before him in a lukewarm, flabby, and tepid condition, caused Halcyon to groan. But presently, when bathed, shaved, and attired in a neat knickerbocker suit of tawny-orange velveteen, with green silk stockings and tan shoes, salmon-colored silk shirt, rainbow necktie, and Panama, he issued, cigarette in mouth, from the *châlet*, and strolled in the direction of the newly-restored west wing, his Grace's equanimity seemed restored. He even hummed a tune, which might have been "The Honeysuckle and the Bee" or "God Save the King," as he mounted the short, wide, double flight of marble steps that led from the terrace, and, pushing open the glazed swing-doors, entered the ballroom, the entire space of which was filled by a bewildering maze

of ropes and scaffolding, as though a giant spider had spun a cobweb in hemp and pine. A smell of turpentine and size was in the air, and a paint-table occupied a platform immediately under the skylight dome, the sides of which were already filled in with outlines, transferred from cartoons designed by the artist engaged to ornament the apartment. That gentleman, arrayed in a blue canvas blouse and wearing a deerstalker cap on the back of a well-shaped head, was actively engaged in washing in the values of a colossal nude figure-group with a bucket of sepia and a six-foot brush. He whistled rather queerly as his bright eye fell upon the intruder.

“You’re there, are you?” said the Duke unnecessarily. “Shall I come up?”

“If you can!” said Halcyon Wopse, with a decided smile, that revealed a very complete set of very white teeth. “But, to save time, perhaps I had better come down to you.” And the painter swung himself lightly down from stage to stage until he reached the ground-level of his august relative.

“Put what you’ve got to tell me as clearly as you can,” said the Duke. “I never was a sap at Eton, and the classical names of these Johnnies you’re thingam-bobbing on the what’s-a-name rather queer me.”

“The design outlined on the plaster in the central space on the left-hand side of the skylight dome,” said Wopse, A.R.A., “is the ‘Judgment of Paris.’ The three figures of the rival goddesses are completely outlined, but, as you see, Paris is only roughly blocked in.”

“I don’t see a city,” said the Duke with some annoyance. “I only see a bit of a man. And, as for being block-tin——”

“Paris was a man—or, rather, a youth,” said Halcyon Wopse, quoting—

“ ‘Fair and disdainfully lidded, the Shepherd of Ida,
Holding the golden apple, desired of——’ ”

“Hold on! When people get spouting it knocks me galley-west,” said the Duke. “Just tell me plainly what the beggar was to judge? Goddesses? I savvy! And which of ’em took the biscuit—I mean the apple? Venus? Right you are! That’s as much as I can hold at one time, thanky!”

“Sorry if I’ve over-estimated the extent of the accommodation,” said Halcyon Wopse, smiling and lighting a cigar.

“One of the Partagas. Now, hang it,” said the Duke, “that is infernally stupid of my man.”

“Of my man, you mean,” corrected the painter.

“I begin to think,” said the Duke, “that I have, in falling in with the absurd plot, cooked up by that old footler, Beaumaris, and swopping characters with a beg—with an artist fellow like you, in order to take the fancy of a long-haired, long-legged colt of a girl——”

“I presume you allude to Lady Lymston?” put in the painter coldly.

“Of course. I say, in tumblin’ to the idea and embarkin’ in the game, I’ve made an ass of myself,” said the Duke. “As for you, you’re in clover.”

“Say nettles,” sighed the painter.

“Passin’ under my name——”

“Pardon,” said the painter. “The name is my own. And let us say, simply, that in changing identities with your Grace in order to enable your Grace to cast a glamour of artistic romance over a very ordinary——”

“Eh?” interjected the Duke.

“Situation,” continued the painter. “In doing this I have laid up for myself a considerable store of regret.”

“Regret! Why, hang you! You’re chalkin’ up scores the whole bally time!” shrieked the Duke, stamping his tan shoes on the canvas-protected parquet. Beaumaris’s guests—only a few purposely selected fogies and

duffers, who don't count, it's true—believe you to be me. They flatter you and defer to you. You take the Dowager in to dinner, and I'm left to toddle after with Susanna's French governess. I'm out of everything—and obliged to talk Art, bally Art—from mornin' till night! While you—you've ridden to cub-hunts on my mounts—driven my motor-cars and bust my tires——”

“And very bad ones they are,” said the painter.

“You ride infernally well, and show off before the field at Henworthy Three Gates, where the hardest riders in the county hang back. You ain't afraid of a trappy take-off—you weren't built for a broken neck,” screeched the incensed Peer. “You play golf too, and win the Coronation Challenge Cup for the Lymston Club, takin' seven holes out of the eighteen, and holin' the round in the score of sixty-eight.”

“It was my duty to maintain the honor of your Grace's rank once I had consented to assume it,” said the painter with a bow.

“And you're a dead shot, confound you, knockin' the birds over right and left, and getting a par. in every sportin' newspaper for a record bag of four hundred. You're a polo player too—hit a ball up and down the field and through the goals at each end, and look as if you didn't care whether the ladies applauded you or not, da—hang you! And you must own to bein' a bit of a cricketer, and consent to play in the County Match on Thursday, and I wouldn't like to bet against your chances of makin' a big score—an all-round admirable what's-a-name of a fellow like you!”

“Perhaps you'd better not,” the painter remarked calmly, knocking off the ash of his cigar. “But I should be glad to know the reason for this display of temper on your Grace's part, all the same,” he added. “If I rode like a tailor and shot like a duffer, hit your ponies' legs instead of the ball, and played cricket like a Ger-

man governess at a girls' boarding-school, I could understand——”

“Don't you understand when I get back into my own skin again, I'll have to live up to the reputation you've made me?” yelled Halcyon. “I could pass muster before because nobody looked for anything. But now . . .”

“And what of my reputation? I think I heard you telling Susanna——”

“Susanna!” echoed the Duke.

“She is Susanna to your Grace. Did I not hear you telling her that Chiaroscuro was an Italian painter of the Cinquecento—who, you said, was a Pope who patronized Art! You went on to say that Chiaroscuro lived on hard eggs, and designed carnival cars, and that Benvenuto Cellini won the Gold Cup at Ascot Race Meeting in '91.”

“Look here, we won't indulge in mutual recriminations. It's beastly bad form!” said the Duke. “And though you can ride and all that, I never said I thought you could paint for nuts! In fact, between ourselves, I don't half like havin' these spooks on the ceilin' set down to me.” He twisted his sandy little moustache, and fixed his eyeglass in his eye, and started. “Here's Lady Lymston comin' over the lawn with a whole pack of dogs, to ask me how I've got on since yesterday.”

“Take my blouse!” The painter denuded himself of the turpentine garment, appearing in a well-cut tweed shooting-suit.

“Get into that rag! Not me, thanks! Hand over your brush, and give me a leg up on that scaffoldin', like a good chap. I'd better be discovered at work, I suppose,” said his Grace of Halcyon, as he slowly mounted to the platform under the dome.

He had just reached it when Susanna's fresh young voice was heard outside calling to her dogs, and a mo-

ment later she appeared. Her fair cheeks were flushed, her blue eyes were bright with exercise. She wore a rough gray skirt, which, if less abbreviated than of yore, still showed a slim, arched foot and suggested a charming ankle. Her white silk blouse was confined by a Norwegian belt, and a loose *beret* cap of black velvet crowned her yellow head, its silken riches being now disposed in a great coil, through which a silver arrow was carelessly thrust. She started and reddened from her temples to the edge of lace at her round throat when the tweed-clad figure of the painter caught her eye, and gave him her hand with an indifference which was too ostentatious.

"I didn't know you were interested in Art," she said.

"Oh yes!" responded the painter. "At least, if this can be called Art," he added modestly.

"'Ssh!" warned Susanna. "He is up there, and will hear you."

"He?" echoed the painter, reveling in the blush.

"Did I hear my name?" called the Duke sweetly, from above. "Hulloa, Lady Lymston, that you? Come to record progress? As you see, we're going strong." His six-foot brush menaced a Juno's draperies, a gallipot of size upset, trickled its contents through the planking; his velveteen coat-tails placed Paris in peril, as he turned his back to the cartoon and resting his hands upon his knees, assumed a stooping attitude, and peered waggishly down over the edge of the scaffolding at Susanna.

"Take care—you!" shouted the painter, forgetting his aristocratic *rôle*.

"My foot is on my native thingumbob, ain't it, Lady Lymston?" said the owner of the small, cockneyfied, grinning countenance above. "How do you like the wax-works? This is the"—he flourished the six-foot brush perilously—"this is the Judgment of Berlin."

“Paris!” prompted the false Duke hoarsely.

“He is trying to joke,” said Susanna, in an undertone. “Don’t discourage him.”

“I should think that would be difficult,” remarked Wopse grimly.

“Papa tries to be crushing, and Cousin Alaric’s rudeness is simply appalling,” said Susanna, in a confidential undertone. “And grandmother walks over him as though he were a beetle—no! she would run away from a thing like that—I should say an earwig or a snail, so one feels bound to be a *little* nice.”

“If only out of opposition!” said the painter, with a keen look of intelligence, at which Susanna blushed again.

“He is idiotic when he tries to be funny about Art—and mixes up names and dates—and tells you that Titian sang in opera and Rubens is a popular composer. But he can paint, and Alaric Orme thinks he will be President of the Academy one day. These cartoons are splendidly bold and effective.”

“You think so! Wait till I’ve colored these girls up a bit,” said the Duke, catching the end of the sentence. “Then you’ll——” He dipped his brush and advanced it, dripping with cobalt, towards the group of goddesses.

“Don’t touch them!” shouted Wopse, in agony.

“Why not?” asked Susanna.

“I don’t know. Excuse me, Lady Lymston, I believe the smell of this size isn’t wholesome,” Wopse stammered. “I’ll get out into the air.” He bolted.

“Good Heavens!” he moaned, as he strode unseeing down a broad path of the dazzling west front pasture, “I can’t stand this! I’ll tell that idiot Osmond-Orme that the deception must come to an end . . .”

“Why do you walk so fast?” said the voice of Su-

sanna, behind him. "I have had to *race* to catch you."

"I am sorry," said Wopse, stopping and turning his troubled eyes upon the fair face of his young relation.

"Let us walk on"—Susanna cast an apprehensive glance behind her—"or somebody——"

"Somebody will see us walking together!" said Wopse acutely.

"It is so much nicer," Susanna said demurely, "when one can keep pleasant things to oneself. And we have had a good many walks and talks since you came down here, haven't we? And cliff scrambles—and bicycle rides—and rows on the river. And the fun of it is that, although we are such pals, really, father and grandmother and Uncle Alaric believe that I positively detest you." Her young laugh rang out gayly; she thrust a sprig of lavender, perfumed and spicy, under the painter's nose. He captured the tantalizing hand.

"Do you not?"

"Detest you! You know I don't."

"May I have it?" It was the sprig of lavender. But the painter looked at, and squeezed, the hand.

"If you promise to make a big score on Thursday!"

Susanna, it must be admitted, was learning coquetry.

"I will—if you are looking at me!"

"Done!"

"Done! Come into the beech avenue," the painter pleaded, "just for a few moments, before that little beast follows us. You know he will!"

"He can't!" Susanna's golden eyelashes drooped upon crimson cheeks. "He can't get down! I—I took away the ladder before I came away!" she owned. Both hands were imprisoned, her blue eyes lifted, lost themselves in the brown ones that looked down at her.

"Was that because you wanted—to be alone with me? Was it?" demanded Wopse.

“Oh, Hal, don’t!”

“I’ll let you go when you have owned up, not before,” Wopse said sternly.

Susanna’s reply came in a whisper: “You—know—it—was!”

The whisper was so faint that Wopse had to bend quite low to catch it. Of course he need not have kissed Susanna. But he did, as Alaric Osmond-Orme and Lord Beaumaris appeared, walking confidentially together arm-in-arm.

“I think my little stratagem succeeds!” Lord Beaumaris had just said, in reference to the preference exhibited by his daughter for the society of the pretended painter. And Alaric had responded:

“Yes, as you say, my plan has proved quite a brilliant success!” when Lord Beaumaris clutched his cousin’s arm.

“Merciful powers! Susanna and that—that young impostor!”

Alaric’s eyeglass fell with a click, and the diabolical left eye twirled and twisted fiendishly in its socket as its retina embraced the picture indicated.

“Feign not to have observed. . . . Well, Susanna! How are you, Halcyon. We are strolling towards the ballroom for a glimpse of Wopse’s work.”

“We are stro——” Lord Beaumaris choked and purpled. Alaric dragged him on.

“Do you think? . . .” Susanna’s cheeks were white roses now. “Do you think—they——”

“Saw me kiss you? Not a doubt of it!”

“Oh!” Susanna confronted him with blazing eyes. “You!—you did it on *purpose!* It was a plot——”

She clenched her strong young hands, battling with the desire to buffet the handsome bronzed face before her. “I’ll never—never speak to you again!” she cried.

“You will not be allowed to,” groaned the poor

painter. "Our walks and rides and all the rest are over. . . . Yes, there has been a plot, but not of the kind you suspect. I am a traitor—but not the kind of traitor you think me. Lady Lymston, I am not the Duke of Halcyon. I am a poor devil—I beg your pardon!—I am a painter; my name is Wopse, and I have disgraced my profession by the part I have played!" He sat down miserably on a rustic bench.

"Oh! It has been a put-up thing between you all!" Susanna gasped. "Oh!" She towered over Wopse like an incensed young goddess.

"If I could only paint you like that! Yes—I deserve that you should hate me. Never mind who planned the thing, I should have known better than to soil my hands with a deception," said Wopse. "As for the Duke——"

"The Duke! Do I understand that that earwig in velveteen is my cousin Halcyon!" Susanna's voice was very cold.

"Yes. I am a kind of cousin, too," said Wopse.

"But not that kind. Those—those designs—the work on the ceiling. They are really yours?" Susanna asked.

"Mine, of course. Do you think that fellow could have done them?" cried Wopse, firing up. "I've risen at four every morning to work at them, and——"

"And you ride splendidly, and you're a crack shot and polo player, and you're going to win for the county Eleven on Thursday," came breathlessly from Susanna.

"Ah, you won't care to look at me now!" said the depressed Wopse.

"Won't I?" Susanna's eyes were dancing, her cheeks were glowing, she pirouetted on the moss-grown ground of the avenue and dropped a little curtsey to the painter. "When doing it will drive father and grandmother and Alaric and the Earwig wild with rage. . . . When—when I like doing it, too! When——" she

stooped, and her lips were very near Wopse's cheek—"when I love doing it!"

"Oh, Susanna!" cried the painter.

"My dear Halcyon!" said Lord Beaumaris, peering short-sightedly upwards through a maze of scaffolding. "I think you may as well come down."

"In other words—the game is up!" said Alaric Osmond-Orme mildly. "Come down, my dear fellow, and resume your own *rôle* of hereditary legislator. Allow me to replace the ladder." He did so.

"So that fellow's done me! I guessed as much when that little—when Susanna took away the ladder," said the Duke, preparing to descend. "And then when I saw him kiss her—there's a remarkably good view of the gardens through the end window. I——" He pointed to some remarkable effects of color splashed upon the ground so carefully prepared by the painter. "I took it out of the beggar in the only way I could, don't you know."

"Take it out of him still more," suggested Alaric, his tinted eyeglass concealing a fiendish twinkle, "by playing in the County Cricket Match. He's entered in your name, you know!"

"You're very obligin'," said the Duke, "but I don't think I'm taking any." He gracefully slithered to the floor as Susanna and Halcyon Wopse entered the ball-room, radiant and hand in hand.

"Papa," said Susanna, taking the bull by the horns, "Mr. Wopse and I are engaged. We mean to be married as soon as possible after the County Cricket Match." She kissed the perturbed countenance of Lord Beaumaris, nodded to the Duke, and walked over to Alaric. "Your plan has succeeded beautifully," she said. "Ain't you pleased—and won't you congratulate us?"

"I am delighted," said the imperturbable Alaric. He

dropped his eyeglass and before the preternatural intelligence of his left eye even Susanna quailed. "And I congratulate you both most heartily." He smiled, and pressed the hands of Susanna and her lover, and, moving away, stepped into the garden. There, unseen, he rubbed his hands, twinkling with mourning rings.

"I loved that boy's mother very dearly, boy as I was then . . ." said Alaric. "As for Susanna, if she knew that I knew she was listening at the library door. . . ." He replaced his eyeglass, and his expression became, as usual, a blank.

LADY CLANBEVAN'S BABY

THERE was a gray, woolly October fog over Hyde Park. The railings wept grimy tears, and the damp yellow leaves dropped soddenly from the soaked trees. Pedestrians looked chilled and sulky; camphor chests and cedar-presses had yielded up their treasures of sables and sealskin, chinchilla and silver fox. A double stream of fashionable traffic rolled west and east, and the rich clarets and vivid crimsons of the automobiles burned through the fog like genial, warming fires.

A Baby-Bunting six horse-power petrol-car, in color a chrysanthemum yellow, came jiggeting by. The driver stopped. He was a technical chemist and biologist of note and standing, and I had last heard him speak from the platform of the Royal Institution.

"I haven't seen you," said the Professor, "for years."

"That must be because you haven't looked," said I, "for I have both seen and heard you quite recently. Only you were upon the platform and I was on the ground-floor."

"You are too much upon the ground-floor now," said the Professor, with a shudder of a Southern European at the dampness around and under foot, "and I advise you to accept a seat in my car."

And the Baby-Bunting, trembling with excitement at being in the company of so many highly-varnished electric victorias and forty horse-power auto-cars, joined the steadily-flowing stream going west.

"I wonder that you stoop to petrol, Professor," I said, as the thin, skillful hand in the baggy chamois

glove manipulated the driving-wheel, and the little car snaked in and out like a torpedo-boat picking her way between the giant warships of a Channel Squadron.

The Professor's black brows unbent under the cap-peak, and his thin, tightly-gripped lips relaxed into a mirthless smile.

"Ah, yes; you think that I should drive my car by radio-activity, is it not? And so I could—and would, if the pure radium chloride were not three thousand times the price of gold. From eight tons of uranium ore residues about one gramme—that is fifteen grains—can be extracted by fusing the residue with carbonates of soda, dissolving in hydrochloric acid, precipitating the lead and other metals in solution by the aid of hydrogen-sulphide, and separating from the chlorides that remain—polonium, actinium, barium, and so forth—the chloride of radium. With a single pound of this I could not only drive an auto-car, my friend"—his olive cheek warmed, and his melancholy dark eyes grew oddly lustrous—"I could stop the world!"

"And supposing it was necessary to make it go on again?" I suggested.

"When I speak of the world," exclaimed the Professor, "I do not refer to the planet upon which we revolve; I speak of the human race which inhabits it."

"Would the human race be obliged to you, Professor?" I queried.

The Professor turned upon me with so sudden a verbal *riposte* that the Baby-Bunting swerved violently.

"You are not as young as you were when I met you first. To be plain, you are getting middle-aged. Do you like it?"

"I hate it!" I answered, with beautiful sincerity.

"Would you thank the man who should arrest, not the beneficent passage of Time, which means progress, but the wear and tear of nerve and muscle, tissue, and

bone, the slow deterioration of the blood by the microbes of old age, for Metchnikoff has shown that there is no difference between the atrophy of senility and the atrophy caused by microbe poison? Would you thank him—the man who should do that for you? Tell me, my friend.”

I replied, briefly and succinctly: “Wouldn't I?”

“Ha!” exclaimed the Professor, “I thought so!”

“But I should have liked him to have begun earlier,” I said. “Twenty-nine is a nice age, now. . . . It is the age we all try to stop at, and can't, however much we try. Look there!”

A landau limousine, dark blue, beautifully varnished, nickel-plated, and upholstered in cream-white leather, came gliding gracefully through the press of vehicles. From the crest upon the panel to the sober workman-like livery of the chauffeur, the turn-out was perfection. The pearl it contained was worthy of the setting.

“Look there?” I repeated, as the rose-cheeked, sapphire-eyed, smiling vision passed, wrapped in a voluminous coat of chinchilla and silver fox, with a toque of Parma violets under the shimmer of the silken veil that could only temper the burning glory of her wonderful Renaissance hair.

“There's the exception to the rule. . . . There's a woman who doesn't need the aid of science or of Art to keep her at nine and twenty. There's a woman in whom 'the wear and tear of nerve and muscle, tissue and bone' goes on—if it does go on—imperceptibly. Her blood doesn't seem to be much deteriorated by the microbe of old age, Professor, does it? And she's forty-three! The alchemical forty-three, that turns the gold of life back into lead! The gold remains gold in her case, for that hair, that complexion, that figure, are,” I solemnly declared, “her own.”

At that moment Lady Clanbevan gave a smiling gracious nod to the Professor, and he responded with a cold, grave bow. The glow of her gorgeous hair, the liquid sapphire of her eyes, were wasted on this stony man of science. She passed, going home to Stanhope Gate, I suppose, in which neighborhood she has a house; I had barely a moment to notice the white-bonneted, blue-cloaked nurse on the front of the landau, holding a bundle of laces and cashmeres, and to reflect that I have never yet seen Lady Clanbevan taking the air out of the society of a baby, when the Professor spoke:

“So Lady Clanbevan is the one woman who has no need of the aid of Art or science to preserve her beauty and maintain her appearance of youth? Supposing I could prove to you otherwise, my friend, what then?”

“I should say,” I returned, “that you had proved what everybody else denies. Even the enemies of that modern Ninon de l’Enclos, who has just passed——”

“With the nurse and the baby?” interpolated the Professor.

“With the nurse and the baby,” said I. “Even her enemies—and they are legion—admit the genuineness of the charms they detest. Mentioning the baby, do you know that for twenty years I have never seen Lady Clanbevan out without a baby? She must have quite a regiment of children—children of all ages, sizes, and sexes.”

“Upon the contrary,” said the Professor, “she has only one!”

“The others have all died young, then?” I asked sympathetically, and was rendered breathless by the rejoinder:

“Lady Clanbevan is a widow.”

“One never asks questions about the husband of a professional beauty,” I said. “His individuality is

merged in hers from the day upon which her latest photograph assumes a marketable value. Are you sure there isn't a Lord Clanbevan alive somewhere?"

"There is a Lord Clanbevan alive," said the Professor coldly. "You have just seen him, in his nurse's arms. He is the only child of his mother, and she has been a widow for nearly twenty years! You do not credit what I assert, my friend?"

"How can I, Professor?" I asked, turning to meet his full face, and noticed that his dark, somewhat opaque brown irises had lights and gleams of carbuncle-crimson in them. "I have had Lady Clanbevan and her progeny under my occasional observation for years. The world grows older, if she doesn't, and she has invariably a baby—*toujours* a new baby—to add to the charming illusion of young motherhood which she sustains so well. And now you tell me that she is a twenty-years' widow with one child, who must be nearly of age—or it isn't proper. You puzzle me painfully!"

"Would you care," asked the Professor after a moment's pause, "to drive back to Harley Street with me? I am, as you know, a vegetarian, so I will not tax your politeness by inviting you to lunch. But I have something in my laboratory I should wish to show you."

"Of all things, I should like to come," I said. "How many times haven't I fished fruitlessly for an invitation to visit the famous laboratory where nearly twenty years ago——"

"I traced," said the Professor, "the source of phenomena which heralded the evolution of the Röntgen Ray and the ultimate discovery of the radio-active salt they have christened radium. I called it protium twenty years ago, because of its various and protean qualities. Why did I not push on—perfect the discovery and an-

ticipate Sir William C—— and the X——'s? There was a reason. You will understand it before you leave my laboratory."

The Baby-Bunting stopped at the unfashionable end of Harley Street, in front of the dingy yellow house with the black front door, flanked by dusty boxes of mildewed dwarf evergreens, and the Professor, relieved of his fur-lined coat and cap, led the way upstairs as lightly as a boy. Two garret-rooms had been knocked together for a laboratory. There was a tiled furnace at the darker end of the long skylighted room thus made, and solid wooden tables much stained with spilt chemicals, were covered with scales, glasses, jars, and retorts—all the tools of chemistry. From one of the many shelves running round the walls, the Professor took down a circular glass flask and placed it in my hands. The flask contained a handful of decayed and moldy-looking wheat, and a number of peculiarly offensive-looking little beetles with tapir-like proboscides.

"The perfectly developed beetle of the *Calandria granaria*," said the Professor, as I cheerfully resigned the flask, "a common British weevil, whose larvæ feed upon stored grain. Now look at this." He reached down and handed me a precisely similar flask, containing another handful of grain, cleaner and sounder in appearance, and a number of grubs, sharp-ended chrysalis-like things buried in the grain, inert and inactive.

"The larvæ of *Calandria granaria*," said the Professor, in his drawling monotone. "How long does it take to hatch the beetle from the grub? you ask. Less than a month. The perfect weevils that I have just shown you I placed in their flask a little more than three weeks back. The grubs you see in the flask you are holding, and which, as you will observe by their anxiety to bury themselves in the grain so as to avoid contact with the

light, are still immature, I placed in the glass receptacle twenty years ago. Don't drop the flask—I value it."

"Professor!" I gasped.

"Twenty years ago," repeated the Professor, delicately handling the venerable grubs, "I enclosed these grubs in this flask, with sufficient grain to fully nourish them and bring them to the perfect state. In another flask I placed a similar number of grubs in exactly the same quantity of wheat. Then for twenty-four hours I exposed flask number one to the rays emanating from what is now called radium. And as the electrons discharged from radium are obstructed by collision with air-atoms, I exhausted the air contained in the flask." He paused.

"Then, when the grubs in flask number two hatched out," I anticipated, "and the larvæ in flask number one remained stationary, you realized——"

"I realized that the rays from the salt arrested growth, and at the same time prolonged to an almost incalculable extent," said the Professor—"for you will understand that the grubs in flask number one had lived as grubs half a dozen times as long as grubs usually do. . . . And I said to myself that the discovery presented an immense, a tremendous field for future development. Suppose a young woman of, say, twenty-nine were enclosed in a glass receptacle of sufficient bulk to contain her, and exposed for a few hours to my protium rays, she would retain for many years to come—until she was a great-grandmother of ninety!—the same charming, youthful appearance——"

"As Lady Clanbevan!" I cried, as the truth rushed upon me and I grasped the meaning this astonishing man had intended to convey.

"As Lady Clanbevan presents to-day," said the Professor, "thanks to the discovery of a——"

“Of a great man,” said I, looking admiringly at the lean worn figure in the closely-buttoned black frock-coat.

“I loved her. . . . It was a delight to her to drag a disciple of Science at her chariot-wheels. People talked of me as a coming man. Perhaps I was. . . . But I did not thirst for distinction, honors, fame. . . . I thirsted for that woman’s love. . . . I told her of my discovery—as I told her everything. Bah!” His lean nostrils worked. “You know the game that is played when one is in earnest and the other at play. She promised nothing, she walked delicately among the passions she sowed and fostered in the souls of men, as a beautiful tigress walks among the poison-plants of the jungle. She saw that rightly used, or wrongly used, my great discovery might save her beauty, her angelic, dazzling beauty that had as yet but felt the first touch of Time. She planned the whole thing, and when she said, ‘You do not love me if you will not do this,’ I did it. I was mad when I acceded to her wish, perhaps; but she is a woman to drive men frenzied. You have seen how coldly, how slightly she looked at me when we encountered her in the Row? I tell you—you have guessed already—I went there to see her. I always go where she is to be encountered, when she is in town. And she bows, always; but her eyes are those of a stranger. Yet I have had her on her knees to me. She cried and begged and kissed my hands.”

He knotted his thin hands, their fingers brown-tipped with the stains of acids, and wrung and twisted them ferociously.

“And so I granted what she asked, carried out the experiment, and paid what you English call the piper. The giant glass bulb with the rubber-valve door was blown and finished in France. It involved an expense of three hundred pounds. The salt I used—of protium (christened radium now)—cost me all my savings—over

two thousand pounds—for I had been a struggling man——”

“But the experiment?” I broke in. “Good Heavens, Professor! How could a living being remain for any time in an exhausted receiver? Agony unspeakable, convulsions, syncope, death! One knows what the result would be. The merest common sense——”

“The merest common sense is not what one employs to make discoveries or carry out great experiments,” said the Professor. “I will not disclose my method; I will only admit to you that the subject—the subjects were insensible; that I induced *anæsthesia* by the ordinary ether-pump apparatus, and that the strength of the ray obtained was concentrated to such a degree that the exposure was complete in three hours.” He looked about him haggardly. “The experiment took place here nineteen years ago—nineteen years ago, and it seems to me as though it were yesterday.”

“And it must seem like yesterday to Lady Clanbevan—whenever she looks in the glass,” I said. “But you have pricked my curiosity, Professor, by the use of the plural. Who was the other subject?”

“Is it possible you don't guess?” The sad, hollow eyes questioned my face in surprise. Then they turned haggardly away. “My friend, the other subject associated with Lady Clanbevan in my great experiment was—Her Baby!”

I could not speak. The dowdy little grubs in the flask became for me creatures imbued with dreadful potentialities. . . . The tragedy and the sublime absurdity of the thing I realized caught at my throat, and my brain grew dizzy with its horror.

“Oh! Professor!” I gurgled, “how—how grimly, awfully, tragically ridiculous! To carry about with one wherever one goes a baby that never grows older—a baby——”

"A baby nearly twenty years old? Yes, it is as you say, ridiculous and horrible," the Professor agreed.

"What could have induced the woman!" burst from me.

The Professor smiled bitterly.

"She is greedy of money. It is the only thing she loves—except her beauty and her power over men; and during the boy's infancy—that word is used in the Will—she has full enjoyment of the estate. After he 'attains to manhood'—I quote the Will again—hers is but a life-interest. Now you understand?"

I did understand, and the daring of the woman dazzled me. She had made the Professor doubly her tool.

"And so," I gurgled between tears and laughter, "Lord Clanbevan, who ought to be leaving Eton this year to commence his first Oxford term, is being carried about in the arms of a nurse, arrayed in the flowing garments of a six-months' baby! What an astonishing conspiracy!"

"His mother," continued the Professor calmly, "allows no one to approach him but the nurse. The family are only too glad to ignore what they consider a deplorable case of atavistic growth-arrest, and the boy himself——" He broke off. "I have detained you," he said, after a pause. "I will not do so longer. Nor will I offer you my hand. I am as conscious as you are—that it has committed a crime." And he bowed me out with his hands sternly held behind him. There were few more words between us, only I remember turning on the threshold of the laboratory, where I left him, to ask whether protium—radium, as it is now christened—checks the growth of every organic substance? The answer I received was curious:

"Certainly, with the exception of the nails and the hair!"

A week later the Professor was found dead in his laboratory. . . . There were reports of suicide—hushed up. People said he had been more eccentric than ever of late, and theorized about brain-mischief; only I located the trouble in the heart. A year went by, and I had almost forgotten Lady Clanbevan—for she went abroad after the Professor's death—when at a little watering-place on the Dorset coast, I saw that lovely thing, as lovely as ever—she who was fifty if a day! With her were the blue-cloaked elderly nurse and Lord Clanbevan, borne, as usual, in the arms of his attendant, or wheeled in a luxurious perambulator. Day after day I encountered them—the lovely mother, the middle-aged nurse, and the mysterious child—until the sight began to get on my nerves. Had the Professor selected me as the recipient of a secret unrivaled in the records of biological discovery, or had he been the victim of some maniacal delusion that cold October day when we met in Rotten Row? One peep under the thick white lace veil with which the baby's face was invariably covered would clear everything up! Oh! for a chance to allay the pangs of curiosity!

The chance came. It was a hot, waspy August forenoon. Everybody was indoors with all the doors and windows open, lurching upon the innutritive viands alone procurable at health resorts—everybody but myself, Lord Clanbevan, and his nurse. She had fallen asleep upon a green-painted esplanade seat, gratuitously shielded by a striped awning. Lord Clanbevan's C-sprung, white-hooded, cane-built perambulator stood close beside her. He was, as usual, a mass of embroidered cambric and cashmere, and, as always, thickly veiled, his regular breathing heaved his infant breast; the thick white lace drapery attached to his beribboned bonnet obscured the features upon which I so ardently longed to gaze! It was the chance, as I have said; and

as the head of the blue-cloaked nurse dropped reassuringly upon her breast, as she emitted the snore that gave assurance of the soundness of her slumbers, I stepped silently on the gravel towards the baby's perambulator. Three seconds, and I stood over its apparently sleeping inmate; another, and I had lifted the veil from the face of the mystery—and dropped it with a stifled cry of horror!

The child had a moustache!

THE DUCHESS'S DILEMMA

"A PERSON called to see me!" repeated the Duchess of Rantorlie. "He pleaded urgent business, you say?"

She glanced at the card presented by her groom-of-the-chambers without taking the trouble to lift it from the salver. "'Mr. Moss Rubelius.' I do not know the name—I have no knowledge of any urgent business. You must tell him to go away at once, and not call again."

"Begging your Grace's pardon," remarked the official, "the person seemed to anticipate a message of the kind——"

"Did he? Then," thought her Grace, "he is not disappointed."

"And, still begging your Grace's pardon," pursued the discreet domestic, "he asked me to hand this second card to your Grace."

It was rather a shabby card, and dog's-eared as though it had been carried long in somebody's pocket; but it was large and feminine, and adorned with a ducal coronet and the Duchess's own cipher, and scribbled upon it in pencil, in the Duchess's own handwriting, were two or three words, simple enough, apparently, and yet sufficiently fraught with meaning to make their fair reader turn very pale. She did not replace this card upon the salver, but kept it as she said:

"Bring the person to me at once."

And when the softly stepping servant had left the room—one of her Grace's private suite, charmingly furnished as a study—she made haste to tear the card up,

dropping the fragments into the hottest part of the wood-fire, and thrusting at them with the poker until the last tremulous fragment of gray ash had disappeared. Rising from this exercise with a radiant glow upon her usually colorless cheeks the Duchess became aware that she was not alone. A person of vulgar appearance, outrageously attired in a travesty of the ordinary afternoon costume of an English gentleman, stood three or four feet off, regarding her with an observant and rather wily smile. Not at all discomposed, he was the first to speak.

"Before burnin' *that*," he remarked, in the thick, snuffing accents of the low-bred, "your Grace ought to have asked yourself whether it was any use. Because—I put it to your Grace, as a poker-player, being told the game's fashionable in your Grace's set—a man who holds four aces can afford to throw away the fifth card, even if it's a king. And people of my profession don't go in for bluff. It ain't their fancy."

"What is your profession?" asked the Duchess, regarding with contempt the dark, full-fed, red-lipped, hook-beaked countenance before her.

"Money!" returned Mr. Moss Rubelius. He rattled coin in his trousers-pockets as he spoke, and the superfluity of gold manifested in large, coarse rings upon his thick fingers, the massy chain festooned across his broad chest, the enormous links fastening his cuffs, and the huge diamond pin in his cravat, seemed to echo "Money."

The Duchess lost no time in coming to the point. She was not guided by previous experience, having hitherto, by grace as well as luck, steered clear of scandal. But, girl of twenty as she was, she asked, as coolly as an *intrigante* of forty, though her young heart was fluttering wildly against the walls of its beautiful prison, "How did you get that card?"

"I will be quite plain with your Grace," returned the money-lender. "When the second lot of cavalry drafts sailed for South Africa early in the year of 1900, our firm, 'aving a writ of *'abeas* out against Captain Sir Hugh Delaving of the Royal Red Dragoon Guards—I have reason to believe your Grace knew something of the Captain?"

"Yes," said the Duchess, turning her cold blue eyes upon the twinkling orbs of Mr. Moss Rubelius, "I knew something of the Captain. You do not need to ask the question. Please go on!"

"The Captain was," resumed Mr. Rubelius, "for a born aristocrat, the downiest I ever see—saw, I mean. He gave our clerks and the men with the warrant the slip by being 'eaded up in a wooden packin' case, labeled 'Officers' Stores,' and got away to the Cape, where he was killed in his first engagement."

"This," said the Duchess, "is no news to me."

"No," said the money-lender; "but it may be news to your Grace that, though we couldn't lay our 'ands on the Captain himself, we got hold of all his luggage. Not much there that was of any marketable value, except a silver-gilt toilet-set. But there was a packet of letters in a Russia writin'-case with a patent lock, all of 'em written in the large-sized, square 'and peculiar to the leadin' female aristocracy, and signed 'Ethelwyne,' or merely 'E.'"

"And this discovery procures me the pleasure of this interview?" remarked the Duchess. "The letters are mine—you come on the errand of a blackmailer. I have only one thing to wonder at, and that is—why you have not come before?"

"Myself and partner thought, as honorable men of business, it would be better to approach the Captain first," explained the usurer. "His mother died the week he sailed for Africa, and left him ten thousand

pounds. We 'astened to communicate with him, but——”

“But he had been killed meanwhile,” said the Duchess. “You would have had the money he owed—or did not owe—you, and your price for the letters, had you reached him in time; but you did not, and your goods are left upon your hands. Why, as honorable men of business”—her lovely lip curled—“did you not take them at once to the Duke?”

Mr. Moss Rubelius seemed for the first time a little nonplussed. He looked down at his large, shiny boots, and the sight did not appear to relieve him.

“I will be quite plain with your Grace.”

“Pray endeavor!” said the Duchess.

“The letters are—to put it delicately—not compromising enough. They're more,” said Mr. Rubelius, “the letters a school-girl at Brighton would write to her music-master, supposing him to be young and possessed of a pair of cavalry legs and a moustache. There's fuel in 'em for a First-Class Connubial Row,” continued Mr. Rubelius, “but not material for a Domestic Upheaval—followed by an Action for Divorce. As a man, no longer, but once in business—for within this last month our firm has dissolved, and myself and my partner have retired upon our means—this is my opinion with regard to these letters in your Grace's handwriting, addressed to the late Captain Sir H. Delaving: The Duke, I believe, would only laugh at 'em.”

The Duchess started violently, and seemed about to speak.

“But, still, the letters are worth paying for,” ended Mr. Moss Rubelius. “And your Grace can have 'em—at my price.”

“What is your price?” asked the Duchess, trying in vain to read in the stolid physiognomy before her the secret purpose of the soul within.

"Perhaps your Grace wouldn't mind my taking a chair?" insinuated Mr. Rubelius.

"Do as you please, sir," said the Duchess, "only be brief."

"I'll try," said the money-lender, comfortably crossing his legs. "To begin—we're in the London Season and the month of March, and your Grace has a party at Rantorlie for the April salmon-fishing. Angling's my one vice—my only weakness, ever since I caught minnows in the Regent's Canal with a pickle-bottle tied to a string. Coarse fishing in the Thames was my recreation in grub times, whenever I 'ad a day away from our office in the Minories. Trout I've caught now and then, with a worm on a Stuart tackle—since I became a butterfly. But I've never had a slap at a salmon, and the finest salmon-anglin' in the kingdom is to be 'ad in the Haste, below Rantorlie. Ask me there for April, see that I 'ave the pick of the sport, even if you 'ave a Royal duke to cater for, as you 'ad last year, and, the day I land my first twenty-pounder, the letters are yours."

The Duchess burst out laughing wildly.

"Ha, ha! Oh!" she cried; "it is impossible to help it. . . . I can't! . . . It is so . . . Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shan't disgrace you," said Mr. Rubelius. "My kit and turn-out will be by the best makers, and I'll tip the 'ead gillie fifty pound. I'm a soft-hearted hass to let the letters go so cheap, but— Golly! the chance of catchin' a twenty-pound specimen of *Salmo salar* that a Royal 'Ighness 'as angled for in vain! . . . Look 'ere, your Grace"—his tones were oily with entreaty—"write me the invitation now, on the spot, and you shall 'ave back the first three of those nine letters down on the nail."

"You have them——?"

"With me!" said Mr. Rubelius, producing a letter-

case attached to his stout person by a chain. "The others are—say, in retirement for the present." He extracted from the case three large, square, gray envelopes, their addresses penned in a large, angular, girlish hand. "Write me the invite now," he said, "and these are yours to burn or show to his Grace—which ever you please. The others shall be yours the day I land my twenty-pounder."

The Duchess moved to her writing-table and sat down. She chose paper and a pen, and dashed off these few lines:

"900, BERKELEY SQUARE, W.

"DEAR MR. MOSS RUBELIUS,

"The Duke and myself have asked a few friends to join us at Rantorlie on April 1, for the salmon-fishing, and we should be so pleased if you would come.

"Sincerely yours,

"ETHELWYNE RANTORLIE."

"The first letter I ever had, dated from Berkeley Square," commented Mr. Rubelius, as, holding the letter very firmly down upon the blotter with her slim and white, but very strong hands, the Duchess signed to him with her chin to read, "that was anything in the nature of a genial invitation."

He allowed the Duchess to take the three letters previously referred to from his right hand, as he dexterously twitched the invitation from the blotter with his left finger and thumb. "This, your Grace, will be as good as half a dozen more to me," he observed, "when I show it about and get a par. into the papers."

"Horrible!" cried the Duchess, shuddering. "You would not do that!"

Mr. Rubelius favored her with a knowing smile as he produced his shiny hat, his gloves, and a malacca

cane, gold-handled, from some remote corner in which he had concealed them.

"Let us, being now on the footing of 'ostess and guest, part friendly," he said. "Your Grace, may I take your 'and?"

"I think the formality absolutely unnecessary," said the Duchess, ringing the bell.

Then the money-lender went away, and she caught up a little portrait of the Duke that stood upon her writing-table and began to cry over it and kiss it, and say incoherent, affectionate things, like quite an ordinary, commonplace young wife. For, after eighteen months of marriage, she had fallen seriously in love with her quiet, well-bred, intellectual husband, and the remembrance of the silly, romantic flirtation with dead Hugh Delaving was gall and wormwood to the palate that had learned a finer taste. How had she fallen so low as to write those idiotic, gushing letters?

Their perfume sickened her. She shuddered at the touch of them, as she would have shuddered at the touch of the man to whom they had been written had he still lived. But he was dead, and she had never let him kiss her. She was thankful to remember that, as she put the letters in the fire and watched them blacken and burst into flame.

* * * * *

"My dear Ethelwyne," asked the Duke, "where did you pick up Mr. Rubelius? Or, I should ask, perhaps, how did that gentleman attain to your acquaintance?"

"It is rather a long, dull story," said his wife, "but he is really an excellent person, if a little vulgar, and—— You won't bother me any more about him, Rantorlie, will you?"

She clasped her gloved hands about her husband's arm as they stood together on the river beach below Rantorlie. The turbid flood of the Haste, tinged brown

by spate, raced past between its rocky banks; the pine-forests climbed to meet the mountains, and the mountains lifted to the sky their crowns of snow. There was a smell of spring in the air, and word of new-run fish in the string of deep pools below the famous Falls.

"I will not, if you particularly wish it," said her husband. "But to banish your guest from my mind—that is impossible. For one thing, he is hung with air-belts, bottles, and canteens, as though he were starting for a tour in the wildest part of Norway. I believe his equipment includes a hatchet, and I think that wad he wears upon his shoulders is a rubber tent, but I am not sure. He has never heard of prawn-baiting, his rods are of the most alarming weight and size, and his salmon-flies are as large and gaudy as paroquets, and calculated, McDona says, to frighten any self-respecting fish out of his senses. We can't allow such a gorgeous tyro to spoil the best water. He must be sent to some of the smaller pools, with a man to look after him."

"But he—he won't be likely to catch anything there, will he?" asked the Duchess anxiously.

"A seven-pounder, if he has luck!"

"Oh, Rantorlie, that won't do *at all!*" cried Rantorlie's wife in dismay. "I want him to have the chance of something *really big*. It's our duty to see that our guests are properly treated, and, though you don't like Mr. Rubelius——"

"Dear child, I don't dislike Mr. Rubelius. I simply don't think about him any more than I think about the sea-lice on the new-run fish. They are there, and they look nasty. Rubelius is here, and so does he."

"*Doesn't* he—especially in evening-dress with a red camelia and a turn-down collar?" gasped the Duchess.

The Duke could not restrain a smile at the vision

evoked, as Mr. Rubelius, panoplied in india-rubber, cork, and unshrinkables, strode into view. One of the gillies bore his rod, the other his basket. A third followed with that wobbliest of aquatic vehicles, a coracle, strapped upon his back. With a grin, the man waded into the water, unhitched his light burden, placed it on the rapid stream, and stood, knee-deep, holding the short painter, as the frisky coracle tugged at it.

"You're going to try one of those things?" said the Duke, as Rubelius gracefully lifted his waterproof helmet to the Duchess. "You know they're awfully crank, don't you, and not at all safe for a bung—I mean, a beginner?"

"The men, your Grace," explained Mr. Rubelius, "are going to peg me down in the bed of the stream, a little way out from the shore."

"But if your peg draws," said his host, "do you know how to use your paddle?"

"That will be all right, your Grace," said the affable Rubelius. "I know how to punt. Often on the Thames at Twicken'am——"

"My dear sir, the Haste in Moss-shire and the Thames at Twickenham are two very different rivers," said the Duke, beckoning his gillies to follow, and turning away. "I hope the man may not come to any harm," he said. "Ethelwyne, will you walk down to the Falls with me? I"—he reddened a little—"I sent the others on in carts by road. We see so little of each other these days."

And the young couple started, leaving Mr. Rubelius to be put into his coracle, with much splashing, and swearing on his part, by two of the gillies and a volunteer. It was a mild day for April in the North. A single cuckoo called by the riverside, and the Duke and Duchess did not hurry, though Ethelwyne turned back before she reached the Falls, below which the deepest salmon-pools were situated, and where the men, the

boats, and the rest of the party waited. She had her rod and gillie, and meant to spin a little desultorily from the bank, the Haste being almost in every part too deep for waders, except in the upper reaches.

"I wonder how that horror is getting on?" she thought, as the gillie baited her prawn-tackle. Then, stepping out upon a natural pier of rough stones leading well out into the turbulent whitey-brown stream, the Duchess skilfully swung out her line, and, after a little manipulation, found herself fast in a good-sized fish.

"What weight should you judge it?" she asked the attendant, when the silvery prey had been gaffed and landed.

"All saxteen," said the gillie briefly. "Hech! What cry was that?"

As the man held up his hand the noise was repeated.

"It sounds like somebody shouting 'Help!' " said the Duchess.

And, rod in hand, she ran out upon the pier of bowlders, and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed upstream, as round a rocky point above came something like a tarred washing-basket with a human figure huddled knees-to-chin inside. The coracle had betrayed the confidence of Mr. Rubelius, and drifted with its hapless tenant down the mile and a half of racing water which lay between Rantorlie and the Falls. The Falls! At that remembrance the laughter died upon the Duchess's lips, and the ridiculous figure drifting towards her in the bobbing coracle became upon an instant a tragic spectacle. For Death waited for Mr. Rubelius a little below the next bend in the rocky bed of the Haste. And—if the money-lender were drowned—those letters . . . yes, those letters, the proofs of the Duchess's folly, might be regained and destroyed, secretly, and nobody would ever—

It seemed an age of reflection, but really only a second or two went by before the Duchess cried out to Rubelius in her sweet, shrill voice, and ran out to the very end of the pier of rocks, and with a clever underhand jerk sent the heavy prawn-tackle spinning out up and down the river. Once she tried—and failed. The second time, two of the three hooks stuck firmly into the wickerwork of the coracle. It spun round, suddenly arrested in its course, but the strong salmon-gut held, and, after an anxious minute or two, the livid Rubelius safely reached shore.

“I’ve ’ad my lesson,” said he, as the gillie administered whisky. “Never any more salmon-fishing for me! It’s too tryin’,” he gulped—“too ’ard upon the nerves of a man not born to it!” Then he got up, and came bare-headed to the Duchess. His face was very pale and flabby, and his thick lips had lost their color, as he held out a black leather notecase to her Grace. “You—you saved my life,” he said, “and I’m not going to be ungrateful. Here they are—the six letters. Look ’em over, if you like, and see for yourself. And, my obliged thanks to his Grace for his hospitality—but I leave for town to-morrow. Good-by, your Grace. You won’t hear of me again!” And Mr. Rubelius kept his word.

THE CHILD

HE arrived late—long after the ship of his father's fortune had been safely tugged into dock—announcing his entrance upon this terrestrial stage at a moment when people had ceased to expect him. I may say that Tom and Leila, having spent twelve years of married life in the propagation of theories alone, had the most definite notions upon the subject of infant rearing, training, culture, and so forth. Leila intended, she informed me in confidence, to be "an advanced mother," and Tom, as father to the child of an advanced mother, could hardly help turning out an advanced father, even had he not cherished ambitions in that line.

The boy—for, as Tom reassured all sympathetic callers during the high-pressure first week of its existence, it undoubtedly was a boy—seemed on first sight rather smaller and spottier than the child of so many brilliant prospects had any right to be. They gave him the name of Harold, a clanking procession of other names coupled on to it, ending in Alexander Eric. And they engaged and imported a professional Child Culturist, Miss Sallie Cooter, of Washington—pronounced Wawshington—certified teacher, trained nurse, member of the Ethnophysiological Society of America, and one doesn't know how many others, to rear Harold on the very latest scientific plan. Miss Cooter, as the intimate friend and chosen disciple of the Inventress of the System at which Tom and Leila had taken fire (a lady of literary talents and original views, who had brought up, on purely hygienic principles, a family of one, and ex-

panded it into a multiplicity of chapters)—Miss Cooter might be trusted to achieve the desired result, and turn out Harold, physically and mentally, a prodigy of infantile perfection. Her work was purely philanthropic, and if she consented to accept the inadequate salary of two hundred a year in return for her services, Leila and Tom explained, she must in no sense be treated as a hireling.

The united efforts of the brougham and the spring-cart fetched Miss Cooter and a mountain of Saratogas from the station one spring day, and she came down to afternoon tea in the very newest of Parisian tea-gowns, which, properly speaking, is not a tea-gown at all. She was decidedly pretty, being dark, slim, bright-eyed, keen-featured, and almost painfully intelligent-looking, even without her gold-framed pince-nez. We devoted the evening to sociality, as Harold's regimen of mental and physical culture was to commence upon the following day.

"But you shall have a little peep at Baby," Leila said, "when we go up to dress for dinner."

Miss Cooter agreed. "But I guess I've got to ask you, since the boy's name is Har'ld, to call him by it, and no other," she said. "Our society is dead against abbreviations and pet names. We hold that they act as a clog upon the expanding faculties of the child, and arrest mental progress. Besides, when maturity is reached, how perfectly absurd it is to hear middle-aged men and women addressed as 'Toto' and 'Tiny'!"

Tom, who has a way of calling Leila "Mouse" when in good humor, turned rich imperial purple at this home-thrust, and Leila, whose pet name for Tom is "Tumps," called attention to the green-fly on the pot-roses, both silently registering a vow never again, save *in camera*, to use the offending appellations.

Miss Cooter was formally invested with Harold on

the following morning. His ex-nurse, a plump, rosy-cheeked country-woman, painfully devoid of culture, and absolutely unskilled in the repression of emotion, was relegated, in floods of tears, to command of the laundry. Leila, compassionating the grief of the exile, would have pleaded for Mary's reduction to the post of under-nurse; but Miss Cooter pronounced that Mary was an obstacle in the way of Progress, and an enemy to Culture, and must go.

Mary went, and Harold, at first too stunned by her desertion to yield to sorrow, presently proclaimed his bereavement in a succession of ear-piercing shrieks.

"What is to be done?" queried Leila, by signs.

Applying both hands to his mouth, after the fashion of a speaking-trumpet, Tom vocalized the suggestion, "Send—for Mary—back!"

But Miss Cooter sternly shook her head, and, bending over the cradle which contained Harold, looked sternly in his flushed and disfigured countenance. He immediately held his breath, growing from crimson to purple and from purple to black as she delivered her inaugural address.

"My dear Har'ld," said she, with crisp distinctness, "you are a vurry little boy——"

"Hear, hear!" I interpolated, and got a frown from Leila.

"And at three months old your reasoning faculties are not developed enough for you to comprehend that what you don't like may be the best thing for you. Mary has gone, and Mary will not come back. Henceforth you are in my cayah, and you will find me fyum, but gentle. However badly you may act, I shall not punish you."

Harold hiccoughed and stared up at the bright, intellectual face above him with round, astonished eyes and open, dribbling mouth.

“Your own sense of what is right and what is wrawng, dormant though it be at this vurry moment, I intend to awaken and——”

Harold, never before in his brief life harangued after this fashion, appeared to grasp already the idea that something was wrong. The expression of astonishment faded, his down-drooped mouth assumed the bell or trumpet-shape, and, rapidly doubling and undoubling himself with mechanical regularity, he emitted the most astonishing series of sounds we had yet heard from him. No caresses were administered for the assuagement of his woe, no broken English babbled in his infant ears. The Rules of the System of Child Culture absolutely prohibited petting, and baby-language was denounced by Miss Cooter as “pynicious.”

As she predicted, Harold left off howling after a certain interval.

“Now I guess you have lyned one lesson already!” said Miss Cooter. “When you are older, Har’ld, you will cawmprehend that the truest kindness on your payrents’ part praumted the separation that has given you pain. You will have your bottle now; you will say ‘Thank you’ for it, and ahfter consuming the contents, you will go quietly to sleep.”

But it took a long time to convince the dubious Harold that the trumpet-shaped, nickel-silver-stoppered vessel tendered by his new guardian was the equivalent of his beloved and familiar “Maw.” When finally convinced, he grabbed it without the slightest attempt at saying “Thank you,” and, with the gloomiest scowl that I have ever beheld upon a countenance of such pulpy immaturity, applied himself to deglutition. Miss Cooter shook her head discouragingly.

“This child has a strawngly developed animal nature,” pronounced she—“a throwback to the primeval savage, I should opine.”

"Delightful! Do buy him a little stone ax and a baby bearskin, Leila," I pleaded. "Think what light he will throw upon the Tertiary Period—if Miss Cooter happens to be right!"

But Miss Cooter shook her head. "He must be environed by softening and civilizing influences," said she, "from this vurry moment. Vegetarian diet is what I should strawngly recommend." Her eye doubtfully questioned the rapidly sinking level of the sterilized milk in Harold's glass trumpet.

"There is such a thing as a cow-tree, isn't there?" said Leila anxiously. "Perhaps Cope might acclimatize one in the tropical house?"

"But while the cow-tree is being acclimatized," I asked disturbingly, "upon what is Harold to live?"

"Kindly take this," said Miss Cooter. "May I trouble you? Please!" she repeated sternly. But Harold only screwed up his eyes and dug his pinky fists into them as his monitress took the empty trumpet away, telling us stories of an atypical and highly-cultured boy baby of her acquaintance who not only exhibited Chesterfieldian politeness at four months of age, saying "Please" and "Thank you," and "Kindly pass the salt," but regularly performed its own ablutions, went through breathing exercises and simple gymnastics, was familiar with the use of the abacus, and could work out sums in simple addition upon a patent hygienic slate. All these facts Miss Cooter put before us with convincing eloquence. Her language was well chosen, her scientific knowledge and technical skill quite appalling. There was nothing about a baby that she did not understand, except, perhaps—the baby.

From that day Harold lived under the microscope. Charts of his temper, as of his temperature, were regularly kept up to date; and his progress, physical and psychological, was recorded by Miss Cooter in a kind

of ship's log-book, in which data of meteorological disturbances appeared with distressing frequency. He was not precocious enough to be classified as abnormal, or sufficiently original to come under the heading "Atypical," or old enough to tell lies, and so he dubbed imaginative. But that tertiary ancestor from whom, according to Miss Cooter, he derived his temperament, must have possessed some strength of character, for from the beginning to the end, Harold's strongest prejudice was manifested towards Miss Cooter, his most violent attachment in the direction of the banished Mary, for whom he howled at regular intervals until he forgot her, when he became reserved, distrustful, and apathetic. His intellectual qualities were not of the kind that responded to scientific forcing. He never learned that an orange was a sphere, or a rusk an irregular cube. The india-rubber letters and object-blocks possessed for him no meaning; the colored balls of the abacus only awakened in him a tepid interest. He was in texture flabby, and habitually wore an expression of languid indifference—intensified when Miss Cooter was delivering one of her oral lectures, to utter boredom. Despite his sanitary surroundings, his day-nursery, intermediate nursery, and night-nursery, papered, carpeted, furnished, lighted, ventilated, and warmed upon the most approved scientific methods, he did not thrive, contracting complaints incidental to infancy with passionate enthusiasm, and keeping them long after another child would have done with them. And then he complicated an unusually violent attack of croup with convulsions, and Miss Cooter guessed she had better resign the case, which she did "right away," in favor of some atypical, imaginative, non-atavistic young American citizen. When last I looked into the hygienic day-nursery, most of the educational objects it had contained had vanished—presumably into cupboards—and Harold was lying

in the cotton lap of his recovered. Mary, nursing a stuffed kitten, and sucking an attenuated thumb. The expression of gloomy boredom had vanished from his countenance as Mary chanted a rhyme, deplorably lacking in sense and construction, about a certain Baby Bunting whose father went a-hunting to get a little rabbit-skin to wrap the Baby Bunting in. It afforded Harold such undisguised delight that I felt sure the rabbit must have burrowed in tertiary strata, and that the predatory parents of Baby Bunting must have been the primal type from which Harold hailed. But Miss Cooter, who could alone have sympathized with my scientific delight in this discovery, was tossing in mid-Atlantic on her way to the land of the Stars and Stripes.

We were, however, to meet yet once again under the spangled folds of Old Glory. It was a year or so later, on board a Hudson River steamboat. She was prettier than ever, quite beautifully dressed, and her *entourage* comprised two nurses (a colored "mammy" and a pretty Swiss), a perambulator with a baby, and a husband. She introduced me to the husband and the baby, a round, rosy baby, neither atypical nor atavistic, but just of the common, old-fashioned kind.

"Isn't he cute!" she exclaimed, with rapture. "Smile at Momma, Baby, and show um's pretty toofs!" Then she addressed the child as a "doodleum ducksey," while I stood speechless and staring.

My circular gaze awakened memories of the past. She asked after Harold.

"He is very well—now!" I said with point. "May I be pardoned for remarking that you do not appear to be rearing your own baby upon the System of Child Culture you formerly followed with such extraordinary success?"

"No," said the late Miss Cooter thoughtfully. "No-o!"

“Why not?” I asked, hot with the remembrance of Harold’s sufferings.

Miss Cooter considered, a beautifully manicured forefinger in a dimple that I had never observed before.

“Why not? You earnestly advocated the system—for other people’s babies.”

“Well,” said the late Miss Cooter, with a burst of candor, “I reckon because those *were* other people’s babies. This is mine!”

A HINDERED HONEYMOON

THE coffee and liquor stage of a long and elaborate luncheon having been reached, the rubicund and puffy personage occupying the chair at the head of the table—number three against the glass partition, east end, Savoy Grill-room—waved a stout hand, and instantly eight of the nimblest waiters—two to a double-leaved folding-screen—closed in upon the table with these aids to privacy. The rubicund personage, attired, like each of his male guests present, in the elaborate frock-coat, with white buttonhole bouquet, tender-hued necktie, pale-complexioned waistcoat, gray trousers, and shiny patent leathers inseparable from a wedding—the rubicund personage (who was no less a personage than Mr. Otto Funkstein, managing head of the West End Theatre Syndicate) got upon his legs, champagne-glass in hand, and proposed the united healths of Lord and Lady Rustleton.

“For de highly-brivileged nopleman who hos dis day gonferred ubon de brightest oond lofliest ornamend of de London sdage a disdistinguished name oond an ancient didle I hof noding put gongradulations,” said Mr. Funkstein, balancing himself upon the tips of his patent-leather toes, and thrusting his left hand (hairy and adorned with rings of price) in between the jeweled buttons of his large, double-breasted buff waistcoat. “For de sdage oond de pooblic dot will lose de most prilliant star dot has efer dwinkled on de sdage of de West Enf Deatre I hof nodings poot gommiseration. As de manacher of dot blayhouse I feel vit de pooblic.

As de friend—am I bermitted to say de lofing oond baternal friend of de late Miss Betsie le Boyntz?”—(tumultuous applause checked the current of the speaker's eloquence)—“changed poot dis day in de dwingling of an eye—in de hooding of a modor-horn—by de machick of a simble ceremony at de Registrar's—gonverted from a yoong kirl in de first dender ploom”—(deafening bravos hailed this flight of poetic imagination)—“de first dender ploom of peauty oond de early brime of chenius”—(the lady-guests produced their handkerchiefs)—“into a yoong vife, desdined ere long to wear upon her lofely prow de goronet of an English Gountess”—(Otto began to weep freely)—“a Gountess of Pomphrey. . . . Potztauzend! de dears dey choke me. Mine dear vriends, I gannot go on.”

Everybody patted Funkstein upon the back at once. Everybody uttered something consoling at an identical moment. Mopping his streaming features with the largest white cambric handkerchief ever seen, the manager was about to resume, when Lord Rustleton—whose tragic demeanor at the Registrar's Office had created a subdued sensation among the officials there, whose deep depression during the wedding banquet had been intensified rather than alleviated by frequent bumpers of champagne, and who had gradually collapsed in his chair during Funkstein's address until little save his hair and features remained above the level of the tablecloth, galvanically rose and, with a soft attempt to thump the table, cried: “Order!”

“Choke him off,” murmured a smart comedian to his neighbor, “for pity's sake. He's going to tell us how he threw over the swell girl he was engaged to a month before their wedding—for Petsie's sake; and how he has brought his parents' gray hairs with sorrow to the grave, and for ever forfeited the right to call himself an English gentleman. I know, bless you! I had it all from

him last night at the Mummers' Club, and this morning at his rooms in Wigmore Street."

"Rustleton!"

"Order!" yelled Rustleton again.

"Order!" echoed Funkstein, turning a circular pair of rather bibulous and bloodshot blue eyes upon the protestant bridegroom. "Oond vy order?"

"Perminme to reminyou," said Rustleton, with laborious distinctness, "that the present Head of my fammary, the Rironaurable the Earl of Pomphrey—in poinnofac', my Fara—is at the present momen' of speaking in the enjoymen' of exhallent health, an' nowistanning present painfully strained rela'ions essisting bi'ween us, I have no desire—nor, I feel convinned, has my wife, Lady Rustleton, any desire—to, in poinnofac', usurp his shoes, or play leapfrog over his—in poinnofac', his coffin. Therefore, the referen' of the distinnwished gelleman who, in poinnofac', holds the floor, to the coronet of a Countess in premature conneshion with the brow of my newly-marriwife I am compelled to regard as ab-sorrutely ram bad form!"

"Tam bad vat?" shrieked Funkstein.

Rustleton leaned over the table. His eyes were set in a leaden-hued countenance. His hair hung lankly over his damp forehead. He nerved himself for a supreme effort. "Ununerrarrably ram baform!" he said, and with this polysyllabic utterance fell into a crystal dish of melted ice, and a comatose condition.

"Bad, bad boy!" said the recently-made Lady Rustleton, biting her notorious cherry underlip, and darting a brilliant glance at Funkstein out of her celebrated eyes as Rustleton was snatched from his perilous position by a strong-armed chorus beauty; and the low comedian, who had become famous since the production of *The Charity Girl*, dried the Viscount's head with a table-napkin and propped him firmly in his chair.

"It is not de Boy, but de man dat drinks it," giggled Funkstein, with recovered good temper. "Ach ja, oond also de voman. How many bints hof I not seen you . . ."

"That'll do, thanks," said the newly-made Viscountess, with her well-known expression of prim propriety. "Not so much reminiscing, you know; it's what poor Tonnie called 'ahem'd bad form' just now, didn't you, ducky?"

"Don't call me rucky," said the gentleman addressed, who was now rapidly lapsing into the lachrymose stage of his complaint. "Call me a mirerrable worm or a 'fernal villain. I reserve both names. Doesn' a man who has alienarid the affeshuns of his father, blirid his mother's fonnest hopes, and broken his pli'rid word to a fonnanloving woman—girl, by Jingo——"

"Oh, do dry up about that now, darling!" said Lady Rustleton tartly. "I dare say she deserved what she got. What you have to remember now is that you're married to me, and we shall be spinning away in the Liverpool Express in another hour, *en route* for the ocean wave. I always *said*, when I *did* have a honeymoon—a real one—I'd have it on the opening week of the production on a big Atlantic liner. And this is the trial voyage of the *Regent Street*, and she's the biggest thing in ships afloat to-day. Do let's drink her health!"

The toast was drunk with enthusiasm. Two waiters advanced bearing a wedding-cake upon a charger. The bride coyly cut a segment from the mass. It was divided and passed round. The ladies took pieces to dream on, the men shied at the indigestible morsels. Somebody had the bright idea of sending a lump to the chauffeur of the bridal motor-car, which had been waiting in the bright October sunshine, outside in the palm-adorned courtyard, since one o'clock. A *chassé* of cognac went round. Rustleton was shaken into consciousness of his marital

responsibilities and a fur-lined overcoat; everybody kissed Petsie; all the women cried, Petsie included—but not unbecomingly. Her bridal gown, a walking-costume of white cloth trimmed with silver braid, contained a thoroughly contented young woman; her hat, a fascinating creation, trimmed with a rose-colored bird, a *marquissette*, and a real lace veil, crowned a completely happy wife. Tonnie possessed nothing extraordinary in the way of good looks or good brains, it was true; but Tonnie's wife was wealthy in these physical attributes. He possessed a high-nosed, aristocratic old fossil of a father, whose prejudices against a daughter-in-law taken from the lyric boards must be got over. He owned a perfectly awful mother, whose ancestral pride and whose three chins must—nay, should—be leveled with the dust. His sisters, the Ladies Pope-Baggotte, Petsie said to herself with a smile, were foewomen unworthy of such steel as is forged in the *coulisses* of the musical comedy theaters. Yet should they, too, bite the dust. In a golden halo—partly hope, partly champagne—she saw Lady Rustleton sweeping, attired in electrifying gowns, onwards to the conquest of Society. The green-grocer's shop in Camberwell, among whose cabbages and potatoes her infancy had been passed; the Board-School, on whose benches the first-fruits of knowledge had been garnered, were quite forgotten. Some other little circumstances connected with the Past were blotted from the slate of memory by the perfumed sponge of gratified ambition. She bore the deluge of rice and confetti with dazzling equanimity. She hummed "Buzzy, Buzzy, Busy Bee" as the motor-car, its chauffeur sorely embarrassed by a giant wedding favor, a pair of elderly slippers tied on the rear-axle, sped to Euston.

"I've got there at last," said Petsie, as the Express ran into the Liverpool docks and toiling human ants began to climb up the ship's gangways thrust down-

wards from the beetling gray sides of the biggest of all modern liners. "I've got there at last, I have, and in spite of Billy Boman. A precious little silly I must have been to take a hair-dresser for a swell; but at seventeen what girl brought up in a Camberwell backstreet knows a paste solitaire from a real diamond, or a ready-made suit, bought for thirty bob at a Universal Supply Stores, from a Bond Street one? And if nice curly hair and a straight nose, a clear skin, and a good figure were all that's wanted to make a gentleman, Billy could have sported himself along with the best. But now he's dead, and I've married again into the Peerage, and I shall sit on the Captain's right at the center saloon table, not only as the prettiest woman on board his big new ship, but as a bride and a Viscountess into the bargain. Wake up, Tonnie dear. You've slept all the way from Euston, and there's a plank to climb."

"Eh?" Tonnie stared with glassy eyes at the scurrying crowds of human figures, the piled-up trucks of giant trunks and dress-baskets soaring aloft at the end of donkey-engine cables, to vanish into the bowels of the marine leviathan. "Eh! What! Hang it! How confoundedly my head aches! Funkstein must have given us a brutally unwholesome luncheon. Why did I allow him to entertain us? I felt from the first it was a hideous mistake."

"Why did you let the fellows persuade you to drink more of the Boy than is good for you, you soft-headed old darling?" Petsie gurgled. She smoothed the lank hair of her new-made spouse, and, reaching down his hat from the netting, crowned him with it, and bounded out of the reserved first-class compartment like a lively little rubber ball. "Here's Timms, your man, with my new maid. No, thank you, Simpkins. You can take the traveling-bags. I may be a woman of title, but I mean to carry my jewel-case myself. Come along into the

Ark, Tonnie, with the other couples. What number did you say belonged to our cabin, darling?"

"The Gobelin Tapestry Bridal Suite Number Four," said Rustleton, with a pallid smile, as a white-capped, gold-banded official hurried forward to relieve the Viscountess of her coroneted jewel-case.

"How tweedlums!" sighed Petsie, retaining firm hold of the leather repository of her brand-new diamond tiara and necklace, not to mention all the rings and brooches and bangles reaped from the admiring occupants of the orchestra-stalls at the West End Theatre during the tumultuously successful run of *The Charity Girl*.

"It costs for the trip—five days, four hours, and sixteen minutes—between Queenstown and the Daunts Rock Lightship," said Rustleton, with a heavy groan, "exactly two hundred and seventy-five guineas. Ha, ha!" He laughed hollowly.

"But why did you choose such a screamingly swell suite, you wicked, wasteful duckums?" cried the bride coquettishly, as their guide switched on the electric light and revealed a chaste and sumptuous nest of apartments in carved and inlaid mahogany, finished in white enamel with artistic touches of gold, and hung with tapestry of a greeny-blue and livid flesh-color.

"Because I can't afford it," said the dismal bridegroom, "and because the meals and all that will be served here separately and privately." He sank limply upon a sumptuous lounge, and hurled an extinct cigarette-end into an open fireplace surrounded by beaten brass and crowned by a mantel in rose-colored marble. "The execrable ordeal of the first cabin dining-room, with its crowds of gross, commonplace, high-spirited, hungry feeders will thus be spared us. You need never set foot in the Ladies' Drawing-room; the Lounge and the Smoking-room shall equally be shunned by me. Exercise on the Promenade Deck is a necessity. We shall

take it daily, and take it together, my *incognito* preserved by a motor-cap and goggles, your privacy ensured by a silk—two silk—veils.” He smiled wanly. “I have roughly laid down these lines, formulated this plan, for the maintenance of our privacy without making any allowance for the exigencies of the weather and the condition of the sea. But if I should be prostrated—and I am an exceedingly bad sailor at the best of times—remember, dearest, that a tumbler of hot water administered every ten minutes, alternately with a slice of iced lemon, should feverish symptoms intervene, is not a panacea, but an alleviation, as my cousin, Hambridge Ost, would say. I rather wonder what Hambridge is saying now. He possesses an extraordinary faculty of being scathingly sarcastic at the expense of persons who deserve censure. An unpleasant sensation in my spine gives me the impression—do you ever have those impressions?—that he is exercising that faculty now—and at my expense. Timms, I will ask you to unpack my dressing-gown and papooshes, and then, if you, my darling, do not object, I will lie down comfortably in my own room and have a cup of tea. If I might make a suggestion, dearest, it is that you would tell your maid to get out *your* dressing-gown and *your* slippers, and lie down comfortably in *your* own room and have a cup of tea.”

The twenty-six thousand ton Atlantic flyer moved gracefully down the Mersey, the last flutter of handkerchiefs died away on the stage, the last head was pulled back over the vessel's rail, the seething tumult of settling down reduced itself to a hive-like buzzing. The *Regent Street's* passenger-list comprised quite a number of notabilities connected with Art and the Drama, a promising crop of American millionaires, an ex-Viceroy of India, and a singularly gifted orang-utan, the biggest sensation of the London season, who had dined with the Lord Mayor and Corporation at the Mansion House,

and was now crossing the ocean to fulfill a roof-garden engagement in New York, and be entertained at a freak supper by six of the supreme leaders of American Society. Petsie pondered the passenger-list with a pouting lip. She heard from her enraptured maid of the glories of the floating palace in which the first week of her honeymoon was to be spent as she sipped the cup of tea recommended by Rustleton.

“Lifts to take you up and down stairs, silver-gilt and enamel souvenirs given to everybody free, Turkish baths, needle baths, electric baths, hairdressing and manicuring saloons, millinery establishments, a theater with a stock company who don’t know what sea-sickness means, jewelers’ shops, florists, and Fuller’s, a palmist, and a thought-reader. Goodness! the gay old ship must be a floating London, with fish and things squattering about underneath one’s shoe-heels instead of ’phone-wires and electric-light cables. And I’m shut up like a blooming pearl in an oyster, instead of running about and looking at everything. Oh, Simpkie”—Simpkins, the new maid, had been a dresser at the West End Theatre—“I’m dying for the chance of a little flutter on my own, and how am I to get it?”

The *Regent Street* gave a long, stately, sliding dive forwards as a mammoth roller of St. George’s Channel swept under her sky-scraping stern. A long, plaintive moan—forerunner of how many to come!—sounded from the other side of the partition dividing the apartments of the bride from that of her newly-wedded lord.

“I think you’re goin’ to get it, my lady,” said the demure Simpkins, as Rustleton’s man knocked at his mistress’s door to convey the intimation that his lordship preferred not to dine.

A head-wind and a heavy sea combined, during the next three days of the voyage, to render Rustleton a prey to agonies which are better imagined than described.

While he imbibed hot water and nibbled captain's biscuits, or lay prone and semi-conscious in the clutches of the hideous malady of the wave, Lady Rustleton, bright-eyed, *petite*, and beautifully dressed, paraded the promenade deck with a tail of male and female cronies, played at quoits and croquet, to the delight of select audiences, and sat in sheltered corners after dinner, well out of the radius of the electric light, sometimes with two or three, generally with one, of the best-looking victims of her bow and spear. She sat on the Captain's right hand at the center table, outrageously bedecked with diamonds. She played in a musical sketch and sang at a charity concert. "Buzzy, Buzzy, Busy Bee" was thenceforth to be heard in every corner of the vast maritime hotel that was hurrying its guests Westward at the utmost speed of steel and steam. Fresh bouquets of Malmaison carnations, roses and violets from the Piccadilly florists, were continually heaped upon her shrine, dainty jeweled miniature representations of the *Regent Street's* house-flag, boxes of choice bonbons showered upon her like rain. The celebrated orang-utan occupied the chair next hers at a special banquet, the newest modes in millinery found their way mysteriously to her apartment, if she had but tried them on, smiled, and, with the inimitable Petsie wink at the reflection of her own provokingly pretty features in the shop mirror, approved.

"I keep forgetting I'm a married woman," she would say, with the Petsie smile, when elderly ladies of the cat-like type, and middle-aged men who were malicious, inquired after the health of the invisible Lord Rustleton. "But he's there, poor dear; or as much as is left of him. Quite contented if he gets his milk and beef-juice, and the hot water comes regularly, and there's a slice of lemon to suck. No; I'm afraid I can't give him your kind message of sympathy, you know, because sympathy is too disturbing, he says. . . . He doesn't even

like *me* to ask him if he's feeling bad, because, as he tells me, I have only to look at him to know that he is, poor darling."

Thus prattled the bride, even ready to *faire l'ingénue* for the benefit of even an audience of one. The voyage agreed with Petsie. Her complexion, dulled by make-up, assumed a healthier tint; her eyes and smile grew brighter, even as the ruddy gold faded from her abundant hair. The end of this story would have been completely different had not the tricky sea-air brought about this deplorable change.

"I'm getting dreadfully rusty, as you say, Simpkie; and if the man in the hairdresser's shop on the Promenade Deck Arcade can give me a shampoo and touch me up a bit—quite an artist is he, and quite the gentleman? Oh, very well, I'll look in on my gentleman-artist between breakfast and *bouillon*."

Petsie did look in. The artist's studio, elegantly hung with heavy pink plush curtains, only contained, besides a shampooing-basin, a large mirror, a nickel-silver instrument of a type between a chimney-cowl and a ship's ventilator, and a client's chair, a young person of ingratiating manners, who offered Lady Rustleton the chair, and enveloping her dainty person in a starchy pink wrapper, touched a bell, and saying, "The operator will attend immediately, moddam," glided noiselessly away. Petsie, approvingly surveying her image in the mirror, did not hear a male footstep behind her. But as the head and shoulders of the operator rose above the level of her topmost waves, and his reflected gaze encountered her own, she became ghastly pale beneath her rose-bloom, and with a little choking cry of recognition gasped out:

"Bill . . . Boman! . . . it can't be you?"

"The old identical same," Mr. William Boman said, with a cheerful smile. "And if the shock has made you

giddy, I can turn on the basin-hose in half a tick, and give you a splash of cold as a reviver. Will you have it? No? Then don't faint, that's all."

"You wrote to say you were dying at Dieppe five years ago," sobbed Petsie, into the folds of the pink calico wrapper. "You wicked, cruel man, you know you did!"

"And now you're crying because I didn't die," said Mr. Boman, arranging his sable forehead-curls in the glass, and complacently twirling a highly-waxed mustache. "No pleasing you women. You never know what you want, strikes me."

"But somebody sent me a French undertaker's bill for a first-class funeral, nearly thirty pounds it came to when we'd got the francs down to sovereigns," moaned Petsie, "and I paid it."

"That was my little dodge," said Mr. Boman calmly, "to get a few yellow-birds to go on with. Trouble I'd got into—don't say any more about it, because I am a reformed character now. And now we're talking about characters, what price yours, my Lady Rustleton?"

"Oh, Billy!"

"Bigamy ain't a pretty word, but that's what it comes to, as I've said to myself many an evening as I smoked my cigar on the second-class deck promenade, and heard you singing away in there to the swells in the music-room like a—like a cage full of canaries. I shan't make no scene nor nothing like that, says I. Her hair's getting a bit off color—see it by daylight, she'll have to come my way before long, and then I shall tip her the ghost with a vengeance."

"Oh, Bill dear, how could you be so cruel!" pleaded Petsie.

"Not so much of the 'Bill dear,' I'll trouble you," said Mr. Boman sternly. "Why don't you produce that aristocratic corpse you've married, and let me have it

out with him? Seasick, is he? I'll make him land-sick before I've done with him, and so I tell you. He'll have to sell some of his blooming acres to satisfy me, or some of them diamonds of yours, my lady."

But at this juncture the delayed attack of hysteria swooped upon its victim. Summoning his young lady-assistant, Mr. Boman, with a few injunctions, placed the patient in her care. Then brushing a few bronze-hued hairs from his frock-coat, removing his dapper apron, and tidying his hair with a rapid application of the brush, he winked as one well pleased, and betook himself to Gobelin Tapestry Bridal Suite Number Four, in the character of a Messenger of Fate.

Three hours later the news had leaked out all over the *Regent Street*. The great vessel buzzed like a wasps'-nest, and the utmost resources of wireless telegraphy were taxed to communicate to sister ships upon the ocean and fellow-men upon the nearest land the astounding fact of the sudden collapse of the Rustleton marriage, owing to the arrival on the scene of a previous husband of the lady.

"*Ach Himmel!* it is klorious!" gasped Funkstein, waving a pale blue paper, "I haf here Petsie's reply to de offer of de Syindigate—she comes to de Vest End Theatre; at an advanced salary returns—and de house will be cram-jammed to de doors for anoder tree hoon-dred performances. It is an ill vind dot to nopody plows goot, mark my vords!"

Lord Pomphrey had just given utterance to a similar sentiment; Rustleton, on the other side of the Atlantic, had previously arrived at a like conclusion. Mr. Boman had entertained the same view from the outset of affairs. Petsie—again Le Poyntz—realizing the gigantic advertisement that the resurrection of her first proprietor involved, was gradually becoming reconciled to the situation. When all the characters of a tale are made content, is it not time the narrative came to a close?

“CLOTHES—AND THE MAN—!”

THE smoking-room of the Younger Sons' Club, the bow-windows of which command a view of Piccadilly, contained at the hour of two-thirty its full complement of habitual nicotians, who, seated in the comfortable arm-chairs, recumbent on the leather divans, or grouped upon the hearthrug, lent their energies with one accord to the thickening of the atmosphere.

Hambridge Ost, a small, drab-hued man with a triangular face, streakily-brushed hair, champagne-bottle shoulders, and feet as narrow as boot-trees without the detachable side-pieces, invariably encased in the shiniest of patent leathers,—Hambridge, from behind a large green cigar, was giving a select audience of very young and callow listeners the benefit of his opinions upon dress.

“If I proposed to jot down the small events of my insignificant private life, dear fellers, or had the gift—supposing I did commit 'em to paper—of makin' 'em interesting . . .” said Hambridge, raising his eyebrows to the edge of his carefully parted hair and letting them down again, “I don't mind telling you, dear fellers, that the resultant volume or two would mark an epoch in autobiographical literature. But, like the violet—so to put it—I have, up to the present, preferred to blush unseen. Not that the violet *can* blush anything but purple—or blue in frosty weather, but the simile has up to now always held good in literature. Lord Pomphrey—a man appreciative to a degree of the talents of his relatives—has said to me a thousand times if one, ‘Confound you, Hambridge, why is not that, or this, or the

other, so to put it, in print?’ But Pomphrey may be partial——”

“No, no!” exclaimed, in a very deep bass, a very young man in a knitted silk waistcoat and a singularly brilliant set of pimples. “No, no!”

“Much obliged, dear fellow,” said Hambridge, hoisting his eyebrows and letting them drop in his characteristic manner. “Some of my views may possess originality—even freshness when expressed, as I invariably express ’em, in a perfectly commonplace manner.”

“No, no!” again exclaimed the pimply-faced owner of the deep bass voice.

“As to the Ethics of the Crinoline, now,” went on Hambridge, “I observe that an energetic effort is being made—in a certain quarter and amongst a certain *coterie*—to revive the discarded hoops of 1855-66. They did their best to impart a second vitality to the Early Victorian poke-bonnet some years ago. Why did the effort fail, dear fellers? Because, with their accompanying garniture of modesty, blushes were considered necessary to the feminine equipment at the date I have mentioned. And because blushes—I speak on the most reliable authority—are more difficult to simulate than tears. Also because, looking down the pink silk-lined tunnel of the poke-bonnet of 1855-66, it was impossible for you, as an ordinary male creature, to decide whether the rosy glow invading the features of the woman you adored—we adored women, dear fellows, at that period—was genuine or the reverse. There you have in a nutshell the reason why the poke-bonnet was not welcomed at the dawn of the twentieth century. Modesty and blushes, dear fellers, are out of date.”

Hambridge leaned back in his chair with an air of mild triumph, running his movable eye—the left was rigidly fixed behind his monocle—over the faces of the listeners.

"Will the woman of the Twentieth Century willingly enclose her legs—they were limbs in 1855-66—once more in the steel-barred calico cage, fifteen feet in circumference, if not more, that contained the woman of the Early Victorian Era? Dear fellers, the question furnishes material for an interestin' debate. In my young days there was no sittin' in ladies' pockets, no cosy-cornering, so to put it. You invariably kept at a respectful distance from the young creature whom you, more or less ardently—we could be ardent in those days—desired to woo and win, simply because you couldn't get nearer. You didn't approach her mother for permission to pay your addresses—her mother was encased in a similar panoply. You went to her father, because you could get at him—there you have the plain, simple reason of the custom of 'askin' Papa.' And if you were reprehensibly desirous of eloping with another fellow's wife, you didn't express your wish in words. You wrote a letter invitin' her to fly with you—we called it flying in those days—and dropped it in the post. If the lady disapproved, she dropped you. If not, she bolted with you in a chaise with four or a pair—and even then her crinoline kept you at a distance. You were no more at liberty to put your arm round her waist than if the eye of Early Victorian Society had been glued upon you.

"To put forward another reason *contra* the reacceptance of the crinoline by the Woman of To-day, dear fellers, the Woman of To-day can swim. Therefore, the advantage of being dressed practically in a lifebuoy, does not appeal to her as it did early in the previous reign. I could quote you an instance of an accident which occurred to the Dover and Calais paddle-wheel steam-packet, on board which I happened to be a passenger, which, owing to the negligence of the captain, ran ashore upon a sandbank half a mile from the pier.

The first boat which was lowered was filled with lady passengers, all in crinolines. It was swamped by a wave which washed over the stern. The steersman and the sailors who were rowing were unluckily snatched to a watery grave, poor fellows. Not so the women passengers of the swamped boat, dear creatures, who simply floated, keeping hold of one another's scarves and bonnet-strings, and so forth, until they could be picked up and conveyed ashore. Not one of 'em could swim a stroke—and all were saved, thanks to the crinoline in which each was attired. But, useful as under certain circumstances the birdcage may be, the Twentieth Century Woman will never be tempted back into it. She has learned what it is to have muscles and to use 'em, dear fellers! and the era of languid inertia is over for her.

“I will add, dear fellers, that in these drab and uncommonly dismal days of early December, the dash of color now perceptible in the clothes of the best dressed men present at social functions of the superior sort, adds largely to the cheeriness of the scene. *Cela me fait cet effet*, dear fellers, but of course I may be wrong. And the first man to adopt and appear in the newest style in evenin' dress—a bright blue coat of fine faced cloth, with black velvet collar, velvet cuffs, and silk facin's, worn with trousers of the same material, braided with black down the side seams, and a V-cut vest of white Irish silk poplin—has realized a fortune through it.

“A well-known man, dear fellers, connected with two old Tory families of the highest distinction, educated at Eton, popular at the University—where he did not allow his love of study to interfere with the more serious pursuit of sport—d'ye take me? Suppose we call him Eric de Peauchamp-Walmerdale. His marriage took place yesterday at St. Neot's, Knightsbridge, the sacred edifice bein' decorated with large lilies and white chry-

anthemums, and the gatherin' of guests surprisingly large—the biggest crush of the Season as yet. There were six little girl-bridesmaids in pale blue, with diamond locketts, and the bride's train was carried by four pages, also in pale blue, with gold-headed canes. As for the bride, considerin' her age—a cool seventy—surprisin', dear fellers! Only daughter and heiress of an ex-butler, who invented a paste for cleanin' plate, patented it, and became a millionaire, Isaac Shyne, Esq., M.P., of The Beeches, Wopsley, and 710, Park Lane, deceased ten years ago at the ripe age of ninety.

“De Peauchamp-Walmerdale's married sister lived next door to the rich Miss Shyne, who practically went nowhere, and only received her Nonconformist minister, and a few whist-playin' friends of the same denomination on certain specified evenin's. House absolutely Early Victorian—walnut-wood drawing-room suite, upholstered in green silk rep, mahogany and brown leather for the dinin'-room. Berlin woolwork curtains, worked by the mistress of the house, at all the front windows. Three parrots, two poodles, and a pair of King Charles spaniels of the obsolete miniature breed. Maid-servants—all elderly, butler like a bishop, uncommon good cellar of gouty old Madeiras and sherries, laid down by the defunct Shyne, awful collection of pictures by Smith, Jones, Brown, and Robinson, splendid plate, too heavy to lift. And a fortune of one hundred and fifty thousand in the most reliable Home Rails and breweries, besides an estate of sixty thousand acres in Crannshire, and the title deeds of the Park Lane house.

“It came—the idea of bringin' Miss Shyne and De Peauchamp-Walmerdale together—like a flash of inspiration—as the dear feller's sister, Lady Tewsminster, told me yesterday when people had struggled up after the Psalm, and yawned through the address, *not* delivered by a Nonconformist, but by the Bishop of Baxter-

ham; and while the choir were singin’, ‘O Perfect Love!’ She was frightfully cast down when she discovered through her maid, who had scraped, under orders, an acquaintance with Miss Shyne’s elderly confidential attendant, that her lady objected to young gentlemen—couldn’t endure the sight, so to put it, of anything masculine under fifty, or without a bulge under the waist-coat, and a bald top to its head. Further inquiries elicited that Miss Shyne had had a disappointment in early life, and wore at the back of an old-fashioned cameo brooch, representin’ the ‘Choice of Paris,’ the portrait on ivory of a handsome young man with fair hair, the livin’ image of Eric de Peauchamp-Walmerdale, in a light blue tail-coat, with a black velvet collar and gold buttons, holding a King Charles spaniel of the miniature breed under his arm.

“Dear fellers, Lady Tewsmminster, the evening upon which she received this item of information, knew no more than a newly-born infant what she was going to do with it. As happens to most of us, she mentally filed it for further reference, and getting into her gown, her diamonds, and her evening *coiffure*—those Etruscan rolled curls are extremely becoming to a woman of pronounced outlines, and there’s only one place in London, she tells me, where they can be bought or redressed—went down to the drawing-room.

“A small but select party had been invited for the evenin’, including, on the feminine side, an American heiress on the lookout for a husband with a title—or, at least, the next heir to one—a handsome widow with a fairly decent jointure, and a couple of marriageable girls with almost quite respectable *dots*. From these, carefully collected on approval by a devoted sister, De Peauchamp-Walmerdale might, who knows? have selected a life partner, and sunk into the obscurity of moderate means for ever, had it not occurred to him

upon that particular evening—do you take me, dear feller?—to array himself in the latest cry of modern masculine evening dress.

"He was standing on the hearthrug when Lady Tewminster entered, a tall, slim, youthful figure, fair-haired and complexioned, and quite uncommonly handsome, in his light blue coat with the black velvet collar, braided accompaniments, and pearl-buttoned, watch-chainless, white silk vest.

"'How do you like me, Ju, old girl?' he said, coming to kiss her. 'I've come to dine in character as our great-grandfather. Awful fool I feel, but my tailor insisted on my wearin' 'em, and as I owe the brute a frightful bill I thought I'd best appease him by givin' in.'

"The gilded Early Victorian frame of the high mantel-mirror behind De Peauchamp-Walmerdale had the effect of being a frame, if you foller me, out of which the figure of the dear feller had stepped. A cameo brooch shot into the mind of Lady Tewminster, above it the long narrow face and dowdy black lace bonnet of the heiress, Miss Jane Ann Shyne. A plan of campaign was instantly formulated in the mind of that surprising woman. She stepped to one of the windows commandin' Park Lane, drew aside the blind, and saw, paddlin' up and down on the rainy pavement outside, the water-proofed figure of Miss Shyne's confidential maid, taking the King Charles spaniels and the poodles for their customary evenin' ta-ta. Instantly she touched the bell, sent for her maid and said to her in a rapid undertone, 'Johnson, ten pounds are yours if you can steal one of Miss Shyne's pet King Charles spaniels while their attendant is not looking. There is no risk—I shall send the creature back in ten minutes. Will you undertake this? Yes? Very well, go and get the beast.'

"The maid, Johnson, departed swiftly, the area-gate

clicked, and Lady Tewsminster, feverish with the great project boiling under her transformation, paced the drawing-room until she heard the second click of the gate. She swept down the stairs to meet Johnson, in whose black silk apron struggled the smallest of the King Charles spaniels. ‘Did the woman see?’ whispered the mistress. ‘Not a bit of her, my lady,’ returned the maid. ‘She was gossiping with the District Police-Inspector about a burglary they’ve had three doors away. So I got Tottles—that’s his name, my lady—quite easy, not being on a lead.’

“Telling the maid the promised ten pounds should be hers that night, Lady Tewsminster snatched the struggling ‘Tottles’ from the enveloping apron and swept back to her drawing-room to carry out her plan. ‘Peachie dear,’ she said as she entered, ‘it would be frightfully sweet of you if you would run in next door and carry this little beast to its owner, Miss Shyne. Insist on seeing her; do not give the animal into any other hands; do not wear your hat or an overcoat. I am firm upon this; and remember,’ she fixed her large, expressive eyes full upon her brother’s face, ‘remember, she has *nearly two hundred thousand pounds, and your fate is in your own hands! . . . Go!*’

“Rather bewildered by Lady Tewsminster’s almost tragic address, De Peauchamp-Walmerdale took the wriggling Tottles, left the house, and carried out his instructions to the letter. The loss of Tottles had been discovered. Miss Shyne’s establishment was topsyturvy when he arrived, servants tearing up and down stairs, the confidential attendant in tears on a hall chair, Miss Shyne in hysterics in her Early Victorian boudoir, the remaining dogs barking their heads off, and the very devil to pay. But the arrival of De Peauchamp-Walmerdale, dear fellers, caused a lull in the storm. Faithful to his instructions, he refused to give up the dog, ex-

cept to its mistress, and after a feint or two of departure, Miss Shyne gave in and ordered her fate, as it turned out to be—d'ye foller me?—to be shown upstairs.

"The Early Victorian drawing-room, with the green rep furniture and the Berlin woolwork curtains—a pattern of macaws and dahlias, I understood—was in partial darkness. Only the wax candles in the crystal candelabra on the marble mantelshelf were alight, no electric illuminations bein' permitted on the premises.

"De Peauchamp-Walmerdale—dog under his arm—took up a commandin' position on the hearthrug, also worked in Berlin wool, in front of a small, mysterious and palely-twinkling fire. As he did so the foldin' doors opposite, communicating with the boudoir, slowly opened, and Miss Jane Ann Shyne, spinster, aged seventy, saw before her the long-dead romance of her youth, resuscitated from the ashes of—wherever long-dead romances are deposited, dear fellers. There was a faint, feminine scream—quite Early Victorian in character—a rustle of old-fashioned satins—an outburst of joyous barks from Tottles, a strong, bewildering perfume of lavender water (triple extract), and the old lady sank, literally sank, upon the white Irish poplin vest that added style and *cachet* to De Peauchamp-Walmerdale's uncommonly fetchin' costume.

"What more, dear fellers? The couple were united yesterday at St. Neot's, Knightsbridge. Every penny is settled on De Peauchamp-Walmerdale, and Lady Tewminster says she can now die happy, her dear boy being provided for, for life. She naturally claims the honors of the affair! Quite so, but without the clothes where would the man have been? D'ye foller me, dear fellers? In my poor opinion, the principal factor in the making of De Peauchamp-Walmerdale's fortune was the Man Behind the Shears. Do you foller me? So glad! Thought you would."

THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP SEA

“ ‘LET us be consistent,’ ” said Lady Pomphrey, her three saddle-bag chins quivering with emotion, “ ‘or let us die’—that is what I have always said. Here is my only niece, Wendoleth Caer-Brydglingbury, goes—actually goes—and marries a Liberal Member of Parliament in a red necktie—who makes speeches in town-halls and tents, and things, to masses of people, all about pulling down the House of Lords and abolishing the Peerage, and absolutely declines to allow his wife to drop her title. To you—so intimate a friend, don’t you know?—I may say in confidence I am sickened. I cannot imagine what the world is coming to. I could wish to die and leave it, were it not that Jane and Charlotte are still unmarried, and I have promised to present three of the *sweetest* girls—well-bred Americans of the best type, without a trace of accent—at the first Drawing-room of the Winter Season. And the family diamonds are being reset in view of Rustleton’s approaching marriage—a union satisfactory from every point of view, especially a mother’s.”

Lady Pomphrey paused for breath, and the intimate friend—they had met at Bad Smellstein a fortnight previously while taking little early morning walks, and drinking little glasses of excessively nauseous waters warranted to correct the most aristocratic acidity—the intimate friend murmured something sympathetic.

“Of course, I might have *known* one *could* look to *you* for comprehension and all that sort of thing,” said Lady Pomphrey, graciously bending her head, which was en-

veloped in a large mushroom hat of blue straw tied down all round with a drab silk veil, and patting the intimate friend upon the knee with the stick of her celebrated green silk sunshade. "One of those delightful literary creatures—was it Algernon Meredith or George Swinburne?—has termed friendship 'the marriage of true minds.' Ever since the Hambridge-Osts introduced us—in a thunderstorm—at the firework display in the Park in honor of the Grand Duke's birthday—and being Sunday, I will *own* that the nerve-shattering meteorological demonstrations that drove us to shelter in that extremely leaky Chinese pavilion seemed to me but a judgment upon German Sabbath-breakers—ours has been such a union. Cemented by your helpfulness in the matter of sandbags for a rattling window—Lord Pomphrey is completely impervious to all such nerve-shattering tortures, and will sleep happily in his cabin on the yacht in Cowes Roads through a Royal Naval Review—and your timely ministrations with soda-mint lozenges when acute indigestion virtually prostrated me after a homicidal *plat* of eels with cranberry-sauce, of which I foolishly partook at the *table d'hôte*. The mysteriousness of it allured me. I wished for once to feel like a German. Now I feel assured their extraordinary diet accounts for much that is abstruse and metaphysical in the national character. For you cannot possibly be normal if you are fed upon abnormal things. And I am grateful that Rustleton has never shown himself in the least susceptible to the attractions of their women. I know—almost quite intimately—a Grand Duchess who has brought up every one of her nine young daughters upon red-cabbage soup, with sausage-meat balls and dumplings; and somehow it is suggested in the girls' complexions and figures—*especially* the dumplings."

The friend tittered. Lady Pomphrey placed upon the seat beside her a straw handbag containing a Tauchnitz

edition of the last new Mudie novel, a black fan, a large bottle of frightfully strong salts, several spare pocket-handkerchiefs, several indelible-ink pencils, and a quantity of obsolete railway tickets, and became more confidential than ever.

“Had I been consulted by destiny when the arrangement of Rustleton’s matrimonial future came *sur le tapis* I could not—with my expiring breath I would repeat this—*could not* be more completely satisfied. It began by his hating her. . . . She hit him on the nose with a diablo in June at Ranelagh, and, ‘Mother,’ he said afterwards to me—his upper lip perfectly rigid with wounded dignity—‘I should have greatly preferred to have been born in the days of “Coningsby,” or “Lothair.” Muscular young women create in me a feeling of *positive aversion!*’ He found her agitating even at that early stage of affairs? How subtle of you to see that!”

The flattered friend murmured an interrogation.

“Who is she?” repeated Lady Pomphrey. “But surely the newspapers? . . . You suffer too acutely from dancing spots in the field of vision ever to read when undergoing a cure? . . . Poor dear, I can feel for you. She is the Hon. Céline Twissing—will be Baroness Twissing of Hopsacks in her own right when old Lord Twissing dies. He insisted upon *that* arrangement in the interests of his only child; when the intimation was conveyed from a Certain Quarter that the Jubilee Baronetcy he already enjoyed would be changed into a Peerage did he encourage the idea. Quite a bluff old English type, and I must say in hospitality Imperial. ‘Twissing’s Bonded Breweries.’ . . . A colossal fortune, and that *sweet* girl is to inherit nearly the whole. Shall I say that my heart went out to her from the first instant I saw her? As a mother yourself, you will understand! Here comes the young woman with the tray

for our glasses. *Ja, bitte, Ich danke Sie. . . .* You *don't* mean to tell me the creature is a Cockney! . . . How distressing! I may be fanciful, possibly I am," said Lady Pomphrey, "but I do prefer my surroundings to be congruous and in tone. I'm sure you feel what I convey? You do? How nice that is! . . ."

The friend smiled and inaudibly murmured something.

"Of course," cried Lady Pomphrey, "you're on thorns to hear all about Rustleton's love-match. As I told you, Céline Twissing—the *Christian* name has been Gallicized from Selina—and why on earth not? *Céline* is an expert at diablo. It's a knack, sending these little black and red demons as high as a house, or into your neighbor's eye; and she is as talented as well as a charming girl. With three languages, several sciences, a system of physical-culture exercises, golf, tennis, and the laws of hockey at her finger-ends, she would have gone far in these days of violent recreations and brusque manners, even without a *dot*. Masculine? Oh *dear no!* Perhaps deficient in reverence for what *we* were taught to believe in as the superior sex. Perhaps lacking in feminine *finesse*. I *have* heard it said that the girl of the twentieth century cannot cajole, and is ignorant how to be alluring. Perhaps it is a pity. The woman who has a gift of managing difficult people, smoothing absurd people down, and being perfectly amiable to the absolutely objectionable is practically priceless as a greaser of the social cog-wheels. Now Céline calls that sort of woman, plumply and plainly, a hypocrite. . . . But is it not a woman's *duty* to be a hypocrite, if telling the truth to everybody makes the world a place of gnashing?" demanded Lady Pomphrey, making her eyebrows climb up out of sight under the shadow of her mushroom hat.

The compliant friend assented.

"You understand, then, how dissonant was the chord

Céline Twissing struck in Rustleton. With his Plantagenet dash in the blood, his hereditary intolerance of anything smacking of vulgarity, his medieval attitude of chivalry towards Woman, his Early Victorian dislike of the *outré* and the *bizarre*, he frankly found her intolerable. 'In a drawing-room,' he said to me in confidence, 'that girl reminds me of a Polar bear in a hothouse.' Where the boy could have seen one I cannot imagine—probably it was only a young man's daring figure of speech. Shall we walk about a little? I think I felt a twinge."

The friend agreed, and, gently ambling up and down the Kreuzbrunnen Promenade, Lady Pomphrey continued her narrative.

"Rustleton said she was a New Girl of the worst type. Then came the diablo affair, which, considering Céline's remarkable knack, I cannot think accidental. The bridge of Rustleton's nose was seriously contused, and his monocle was shattered—fortunately without danger to the eye. He took no revenge beyond an epigram, quite worthy of La Rochefou—what's his name? . . . She is keen on dancing, unlike other muscular girls; and said so in my boy's near vicinity. 'Why not? She has hops in her blood,' he uttered. Of course, a little bird carried it to her ear. . . . How d'ye do, Lady Frederica? How d'ye do, Count Pyffer? I quite agree with you. . . . Piercing winds, varied by muggy airlessness and a distressingly relaxing warmth, *have* made the last eight days intolerable. . . . My dear, where was I when I left off?" The suffering friend indicated the point. Lady Pomphrey continued:

"And *after all* they have come together. Quite a romance. If a mother's prayers have any influence, . . . and I am old-fashioned enough to believe they have. . . . But I knew Rustleton too well to breathe a hint of my hopes. I did not stoop to intrigue, as some moth-

ers would, to bring the young people together. But dearest Jane, who is always my right hand, conceived a devoted friendship for Céline just at the psychological moment, and owing to that she and Rustleton were *constantly* thrown in each other's way. Céline quite exerted herself to be overwhelmingly unpleasant. Jane says that during a bicycling excursion in the neighborhood of our place at Cluckham-Pomphrey, she offered to help him to lift his machine over a stile, and would have done it unaided and alone if Rustleton had not peremptorily seized the frame-bar, gripping both her hands in his. On Jane's authority, she crimsoned to the hat, throwing him off like a feather, and, mounting her machine, was out of sight in an instant. He was icily sarcastic on the subject of muscular young women all the way home, and limited his dinner to clear soup and a single cutlet with dry toast, while Céline went through all the courses in her usual thoroughgoing way. They are not in the least ashamed to eat, do you notice?—these golfing, hockey-playing, open-air young people. . . . Now you and I can recall placing a solid barrier of five o'clock cake and muffins between undue appetite and the eight o'clock dinner, at which we merely toyed with our knives and forks, trusting to our maids to have a tray of cold eatables ready in the bedroom for consumption while our hair was being brushed. Of *course!* 'but *these* girls devour at tea, *wolf* at dinner'—I quote Rustleton—'and probably stodge sandwiches and cold chicken and chocolate-wafers before they plunge into their beds. When there, how they must snore!'

“His eye gleamed with such feverish malignancy as he said this, that I involuntarily dropped a quantity of stitches in the silk necktie I was knitting for him—a soothing neutral shade not calculated to call attention to the tinge of bile in his complexion—and exclaimed, 'Good Heavens!' He immediately begged my pardon

and bade me 'good-night,' whispering that he had arranged to shoot over the lower sixty acres with Stubbins, the head keeper—purely as a filial duty, Pomphrey not feeling robust enough to undertake it this year. . . .

"Whether it was my having breathed a hint of this to Jane—who is, as a rule, a *grave* for chance confidence—or whether Miss Twissing had overheard, how can I say? But she and Stubbins were waiting for my boy on the following morning, Stubbins—who loathes sporting women—in a state of complacency that only a five-pound note could have brought about. Her beautiful Bond-street self-ejecting breechloader, her cap, tweeds, and gaiters were the *dernier cri*, and with the coolest self-possession she wiped my poor boy's eye over and over again. Out of thirty brace of birds before luncheon only three and a half fell to his gun, and *those* were of the red-legged French description, 'bred for duffers to blaze at,' according to Lord Pomphrey. Rustleton went up to town that night, charging Jane with all sorts of civil messages for Miss Twissing, and slept at his Club, which was being painted and disagreed with him excessively."

The friend sighed sympathy.

"Even with every door and window open and a flat dish full of milk upon the washstand," said Lady Pomphrey, taking the friend's arm and emphasizing her utterances with the green sunshade, "white paint permeates my whole being in a way that is perfectly indescribable. My son inherits my receptiveness—perhaps my weakness—indeed, he came into the world at Cluckham-Pomphrey during an early visit of ours, subsequent to spring-cleaning, where, owing to an unhappy facility possessed by Lord Pomphrey of being easily persuaded by self-interested persons, the hall screen, grand staircase, and all the Jacobean paneling had been covered by the local decorator with a creamy-hued, turpentine and

glutinous mixture known as 'Eggster's Exquisite Enamel.' It cost a fortune to get off again, and some of it still lingers in the crevices of the carving. My basket. . . . It is a little cumbersome, but I really couldn't think of letting you. . . . Well then, dear friend, if you insist. . . . Now for the really remarkable ending of my boy's story.

"He flew to his cousin for consolation. Now, Wendoleth Caer-Brydglingbury is extremely sympathetic. Only for the color of her hair—a violent Boadicean red, almost purple in some lights—Rustleton and she—but I am devoutly thankful things have turned out as they *have*.

" 'A sea cruise,' said Wendoleth promptly, 'will get the white paint out of your system quicker than anything I know; and your morbid feeling of vexation with this girl, impatience of her persistency in continuing to exist, and so forth, will vanish with other things. Mr. Mudge,'—the person she has since married,—'has kindly asked Papa and myself to join his party on board the steam-yacht *Fifi* for a trip to Lisbon, Madeira, and the Canaries; join us. I assure you a complete welcome and at least half a cabin.' Rustleton recognized the cousinly kindness in Wendoleth's proposal, accepted, and went with her and Todmoxen—the Earl is still robust, but not what he was in the 'seventies, nor is it to be expected—down to Southampton to join the *Fifi*. Mudge is Liberal member for the North Clogger Division of Mudderpool. But for a crimson necktie—the Party badge—and a habit of hanging on to his own coat-lapels when conversing, he is almost quite presentable, and, like all those people who begin by not having twopence, he is astonishingly rich. His welcome to Rustleton was cordial in the extreme. But when Rustleton found Lord Twissing and his daughter already on board, discovered that he was to share Twissing's cabin, and that Céline

slept in the one next door, he was dismayed. He would have excused himself and left the *Fifi* only that she was already on her way. Fate, like one of those curious jelly-like creatures which wave their tentacles to attract their prey and then clutch it and gradually absorb it, had wrapped its feelers around my poor boy. He is now resigned, calm, content, even happy; but when I think how he must have suffered. . . . My salts. In the basket. So kind of you, and *so* reviving."

Lady Pomphrey inhaled with drooping eyelids and sniffed at the salts-flagon from time to time as she embarked once more upon her narrative way.

"The *Fifi* anchored for the night, which promised to be squally, in Southampton Water, about a quarter of a mile from Hythe Pier. Depressed and discouraged, my boy retired to his cabin, leaving the entire party screaming over 'Bridge' at a number of little tables in the saloon. He had just put on his nightalines,—pink with a green stripe, the jacket ornamented with green braid in loops, to match—and was attending to his teeth with a palm-stick, when, with a terrific crash, all the electric lights went out and the *Fifi* was plunged in darkness. I shudder when I realize the awfulness of all that. Don't you?"

The friend supplied a shudder expressly manufactured for the purpose.

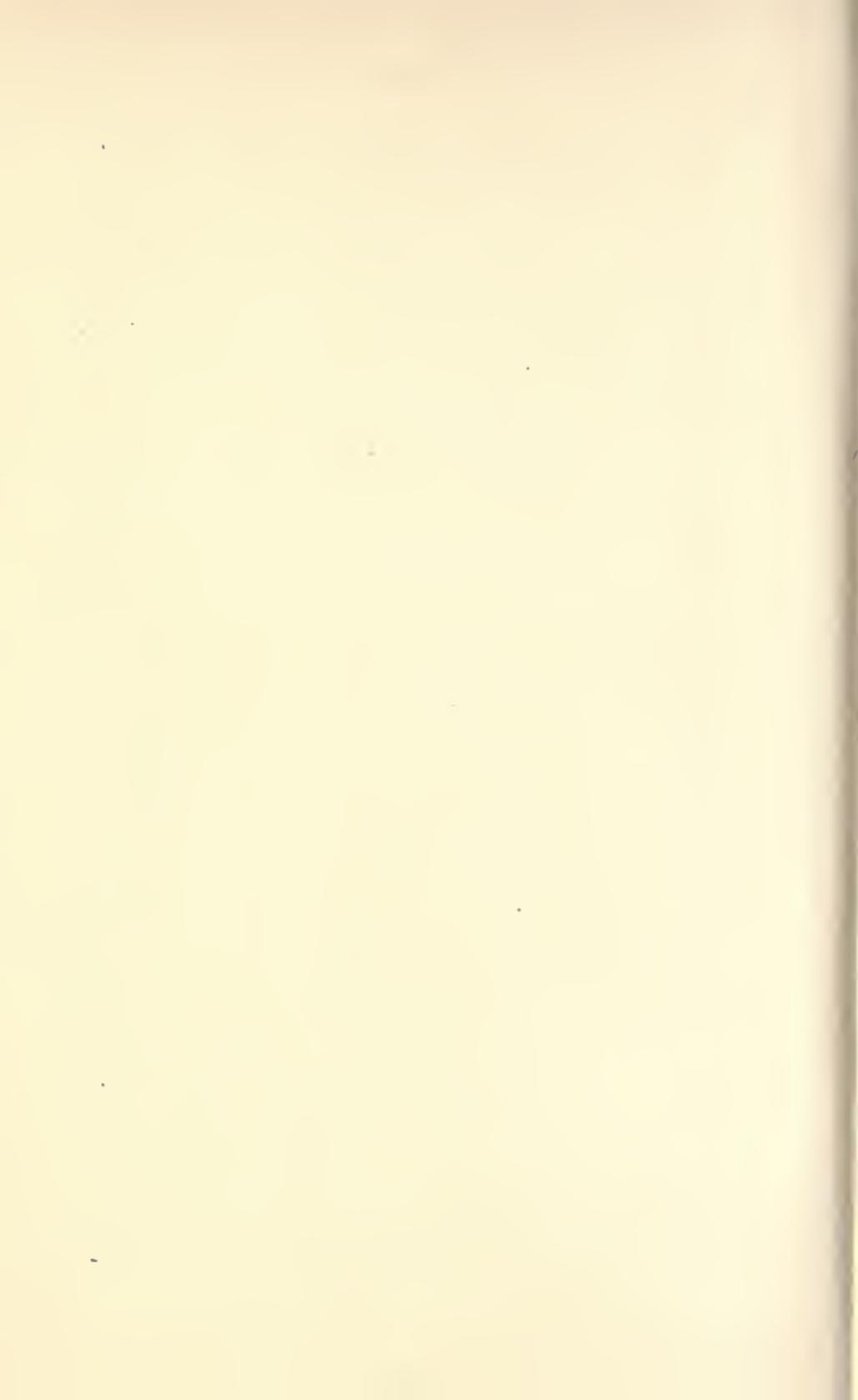
"A Welsh collier steamer, the *Rattletrap*, from Penwryg, had run down Mr. Mudge's yacht, becoming firmly embedded in the hull of the craft—the details are graven on my memory," said Lady Pomphrey impressively—"immediately forward of the engine-room. The crew turned out—not into the sea, but out of their hammocks—the 'Bridge' players rushed in confusion upon deck. In their evening dresses, without being even able to save a bag from below, Mr. Mudge's party were dragged over the grimy bows of the collier. The crew scrambled after. The captain of the *Rattletrap*, having

ascertained that the *Fifi* was rapidly filling, and that all her passengers, as he thought, were safe on board his vessel, was about to give the signal from the bridge to reverse engines when, with an appalling scream a lithe young girl in a crêpe de Chine evening wrap embroidered with roses and turtle-doves—quite symbolic when you think of it—leaped back upon the deck of the *Fifi* and disappeared below. Guess who she was, and whither she had gone? You can? You do? What romance in real life, isn't it? Céline Twissing had missed Rustleton, and, knowing that he occupied the cabin next to her own, had rushed below to save him.

“He had rung for his man and was waiting calmly to be dressed, when she burst in the door with her shoulder—have you ever noticed her shoulders?—and shrieked to him to come on deck and be saved. Wrapped in a Scotch plaid which he had hastily thrown over his pyjamas at the moment of her entrance, he defied her, rebuked her immodesty in entering a gentleman's dressing-room unannounced, ordered her to quit the cabin and go back to her father. When properly attired to appear before ladies, my boy, ever chivalrous and delicate-minded, said he would board the *Rattletrap*. ‘Don't you feel that this yacht is water-logged?’ screamed Céline Twissing. ‘Don't you know she'll sink under our feet in another minute? Come on deck at *once*, you duffing little precisian, unless you want me to carry you!’ He retorted with contempt. She instantly seized him in her muscular arms—have you ever noticed her arms?—threw him, Scotch plaid and all, over her shoulder, carried him up the yacht's companion-ladder, and amidst the cheers of the united crews of the *Fifi* and the *Rattletrap*, handed him over the bulwarks to the men of the collier. Then she followed, the captain gave the order to go astern, the collier reversed her engines, the water rushed into the yacht, and she sank instantly. All that can be seen of

her to-day is her masts. And Céline Twissing and my boy are to be made one at St. George's, Hanover Square, in the first week of the Winter Season. Céline will be married in white satin and *mousseline* trimmed with silver embroidery, and she goes away in a gown of putty-colored *velvelise*—the new stuff. I believe she secretly adored Rustleton from the very beginning, and he, I feel, is reconciled to the inscrutable appointments of Providence. *How* we have been chattering, haven't we? Time for luncheon now. Oh, I pray, no carp in beer, or eels with currant jelly. But one never knows. *Au revoir, dear! Au revoir!*" And Lady Pomphrey put up her green sunshade and sailed away.

THE END





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